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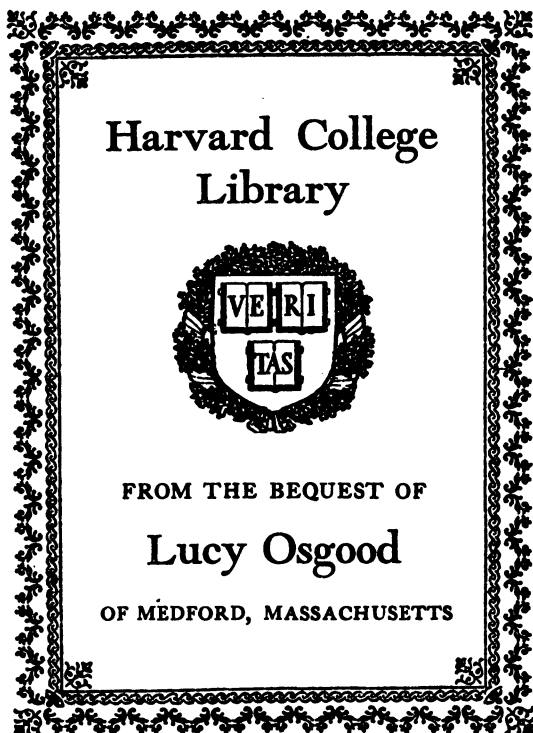
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RIVAL BOY SPORTSMEN



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OR

THE MINK LAKE REGATTA

BY

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AUTHOR OF "SIX YOUNG BENTLEY" AND "GRANT BURTON
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RIVAL BOY SPORTSMEN.

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HATTIE WOOD BRADFORD

WHOSE FRIENDSHIP AND ASSISTANCE

DURING THE PREPARATION OF THIS STORY

ARE GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGED

BRINK PONDS, PA.

April, 1900.

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RIVAL BOY SPORTSMEN

CHAPTER I

PERRY AND DONALD

ONE afternoon late in June, two boys strolled down College Street until they came to a dilapidated fence that partially enclosed a small field where an old horse stood at pasture. Though the rails looked anything but strong, the lads promptly perched themselves upon them and idly watched some students across the way who were evidently choosing sides for a game of ball.

B

I

"Let's go up to the campus and see the fun," suggested Southgate, who was surprised how slowly time went, now that the school term had practically ended. "Anything's better than loafing around in the shade," he added, leaving his seat.

But his companion, who had been casually snapping the blade of a jack-knife with his thumb, now began to whittle away at the top rail.

"Haven't you had enough of base-ball and the like?" he asked, turning about and casting a wistful look at the drowsy horse and the green, sloping meadow. "Come along, Don; we'll go down into the pine woods and up the old railroad."

There was something a trifle unusual in the speaker's tone and manner, a buoyancy that Southgate did not fail to detect. He noted, too, the mischievous twinkling of his friend's frank blue eyes, and stood for a moment regarding him fixedly.

"See here, Perry Langdon, you've got something on your mind, and I want to know what it is — and right off, too," he urged, as they vaulted the fence together. "This is a nice way to treat an old chum, I must say."

But Perry hastened to reassure him.

"You see there's nothing settled yet; it's little more than a rumor," he said, with a half-mysterious, half-confidential lowering of his voice.

"Rumor?"

"Yes, a rumor. Of course you know Grant Burton as well as I do, and the reason he left the academy so — well, let's say so unceremoniously, last fall."

"I was abroad till January, you remember, and know only what I have overheard as idle gossip. Is it true, though, that Burton mistook a stuffed prairie wolf for a real, live panther?"

"Nonsense," replied Perry, laughing heartily. "But Harry Martin and his set did — well, they did humiliate him, and I think he has been the best kind of a chap ever since."

"Agreed. Then Grant is to be the mainspring of your story?"

"I didn't say so."

"No, but you look it. Well, fire away and let's have it."

"Oh, it's quite a long tale, but for certain reasons I suppose I ought to give it to you," said Perry, as they passed from the sunny field into the evergreens and stretched themselves upon the fragrant needles. "You see, after Harry Martin and Walt Hillman captured an outlaw somewhere in the southwest, the club received no end of praise from the press, which it certainly deserved. Then, too, when the boys got back to school, there was a general clamor for membership

in the club, which, by the way, came to nothing, for the roll was limited to six."

"Didn't Grant know that?"

"I suppose he did, and I guess he wanted them to change the by-laws; but when he found they wouldn't, he went off in a huff, and sent for foxhounds to have a little hunt all on his own account, and make the Greyhound Club boys a bit jealous, don't you see?"

"Did he succeed?"

"Well, hardly; and I'll tell you why: it got out somehow that Grant expected to slay Dan Hinton's tame coyote, an inoffensive creature that Billy Clarkson brought East, and that I've seen out at Dan's farm time and again. I imagine Grant didn't know this; but, no matter, he soon learned of it, for Harry bribed Dan to keep the animal tied up, and placed a mounted timber wolf out by the pond, — understand, a dead wolf stuffed with hair and sawdust. It seems that the arrival of Grant's hounds just completed matters to a nicety, for as they had been trained to follow the anise-seed bag, the boys were able to bring Grant and his dogs directly to the decoy by means of dragging a bag of seed through the fields a short time before the hunt. This they did, and sure enough the hounds took the scent."

"If that doesn't beat the Dutch!" exclaimed Don,

flinging a cone at a sportive red squirrel that was doing stunts on a horizontal pine bar a couple of rods away. At this unexpected show of hostilities the frisky little woodlander ducked from sight, the next moment appearing at a lofty height and gazing down upon our friends in evident distrust.

"Oh, the best part is yet to come," continued Perry; "for when the dogs caught sight of the dummy, they wouldn't attack, but bayed frightfully as Grant cleared the shoulder of a hill and fired twice upon the wolf; and to make matters worse clubbed his gun and rushed in, slamming the animal across the head with a force that brought an astonishing flow of sawdust from its throat—so Dan Hinton says, anyway, and he saw it all."

Perry could scarcely finish his speech, for the boys by this time were laughing uproariously.

"Stop, Perry!" began Don, as the peals of laughter ceased for a moment and then threatened to break forth afresh. "It's not right to get so much fun out of a fellow's misfortune. Now go on and tell me soberly what Grant did next."

"Say, he didn't do a thing, oh, no!" chuckled Perry, half lost in a sea of reflection. "He learned somehow that Paul Marshall had owned the wolf-skin, and decided to even things up."

"Did he?"

"In a way. He met Paul out gunning one half-holiday, — it was Saturday, I remember, — and after what must have been a heated discussion sent the little fellow down with a right-hander, and never picked him up."

"You don't mean it!"

"It's the truth, though in the excitement I don't suppose Grant realized how hard he had struck him. Anyway, Deane Cumnor, Grant's room-mate, got wind of the affair, and started out with a couple of the club. They found Paul in the swamp, confused or lost, and brought him home. That night Mr. Grant Burton took French leave of Andover — that's the tale in a nutshell."

Southgate emitted a long, low whistle, and flung another cone aloft.

"I guess you'd whistle if you knew of Grant's experiences as a runaway," continued Perry, thoughtfully. "He paid pretty dearly for his escapade, and got some hard knocks, I hear, among the Blue Ridge Mountains."

"It served him jolly right," commented the other, firmly.

"No one denies *that*, not even he. And now comes the part of the story that puzzles me, for it appears from recent trustworthy information that Grant has received the use of a mountain shooting-

box for the summer and early fall, and is about to form a club himself."

"Well, well! He's a lucky chap!" returned Don, thoughtfully. "But how does that—"

"Concern us?" interrupted Perry. "Just wait till I tell you: this camp is on an island, with water all around, naturally; and they're to have no end of a good time from what I hear, those fellows," he continued, with sparkling eyes and a show of enthusiasm that quite astonished his chum. "Why, Don, old boy, it's a regular wonderland almost; beautiful scenery, great sailing, and any amount of game in the woods."

"But what's all this to do with us?"

"Ah, now you're coming home, Don," replied Perry, sitting up against a tree and cocking his head with the air of one who has a relish for the subject. "You see, Grant and Deane called on George and Billy Clarkson this morning after chapel, and proffered an invitation that included us—and of course we will accept," he added, positively. "It will be a most congenial crowd, for Billy is a very good man in the woods, besides the jolliest of lads; I naturally think my brother a prince of good fellows, and we are not the worst in the world, are we?"

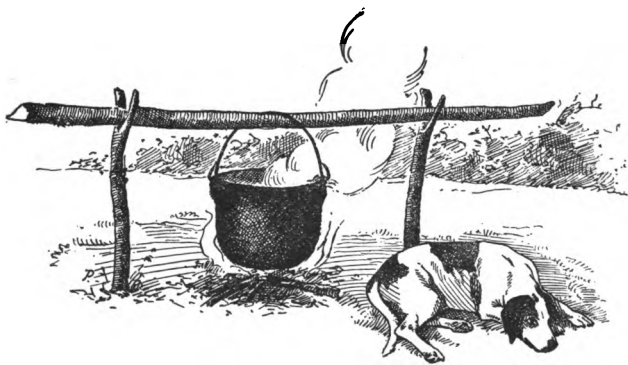
Donald gave vent to a lusty cheer.

"Well, hardly," he said in reply. "I didn't know we were quite so popular as we appear to be, though."

"Between you and me, I imagine Grant's family had something to say about it," explained Perry, "for they're old friends with father."

"Good enough! But what's on the programme if all this *is* so?" demanded Don. "I guess there must be something uncommon on foot."

"You may rest assured there is — something uncommonly exciting," responded the other, jumping up and glancing at the face of his watch—it was a quarter to four. "Old fellow, we're invited to an important meeting to be held at four in the cedar grove by the old railroad. Come, let's be going." And locking arms, the chums swung lightly out of sight among the trees.





CHAPTER II

THE SQUIRREL ISLAND CLUB

IT was a merry quartet that Don and Perry found gathered on their arrival at the cedars after ten minutes' walk. There were our old friends, Grant Burton and Deane Cumnor, the young gentleman from Crooked Trail, Arizona, Billy Clarkson by name, and George Langdon.

Grant has changed but little since we last saw him on his return to school after his memorable experiences as a runaway among the Blue Ridges. He is the same hazel-eyed, chestnut-haired lad, though a close observer could not fail to see that during the winter a deal of the old petulance noticeable on some occasions had left his not unattractive face. The fact of the matter was that throughout the long, hard months following his return he had labored manfully

to overtake his class, which he had not fully accomplished till well toward spring. Then, too, the remembrances of his "despicable conduct," as he sometimes alluded to the events following the "wolf-hunt," had been for many days an ugly thorn in his heart, and these he strove to outlive by taking an active part in school affairs. He contributed timely articles to the *Phillipian* on certain phases of the Exeter controversy, then at its height, penned delightful short stories for the *Mirror*, and in other ways made himself conspicuous among the four hundred odd students who thronged the chapel each morning at eight.

Deane had proved himself the best kind of a friend, and had assisted his belated room-mate in many ways the latter never forgot. There had been something so sincere in his conduct that Grant was deeply touched, and when the long string of algebraic solutions, Greek exercises, and French verbs were at last mastered, Deane's simple "You've done well, Grant," was more appreciated than the patting on the back he got from Professor Graves.

About the middle of June both Grant and Deane passed the preliminary examinations for admittance to the university, and though the former received a condition in French, he was silently proud of his efforts, and fell to discussing vacation plans at once,

glad to be rid of "the summer grind" which at one time had seemed unavoidable.

It was agreed from the outset that Mink Lake and Squirrel Island would prove a most acceptable play-house for their vacation drama, but nothing took definite form until a certain letter from far-off California reached Grant. Then it was that the boys considered the advisability of asking the Langdons and Don Southgate to join them.

"Now if you can find another, and they all accept, you'll be even up with the Greyhound Club," suggested Deane, the day before the opening of our story. "You might ask Billy, for six is a nice number, anyway."

"That's so!" exclaimed Grant, "'Smiling' Billy Clarkson, the very chap we want to put life in the set," and he completed the list he had jotted down. "Some say he's the best shot in school."

So, as Perry said, George and Billy were approached on the subject, and it is needless to say they were fully as enthusiastic as Perry and Don, whom we left nearing the quartet in the glade.

Grant arose to greet the expected guests, and in schoolboy fashion waved them a welcome.

"It's mighty good of you to come," he said, motioning them to the log where the others were comfortably seated. "It's not much of a club-room,

fellows, but I thought it would be cooler than the dormitories."

"And far pleasanter," added Billy, watching a crow swing rhythmically toward a distant meadow. "My, but I'd like to be that chap for about sixty minutes by the clock! I'd put an astonishing distance between me and my books."

"This little nook suits me to a 'T,'" ventured George, crossing his legs and shading his eyes from a beam of sunlight that sifted through the evergreen tops.

"Because you never were very exacting," retorted Billy, roguishly. "Can't you see all these rusty sardine cans lying about? And that empty tomato receptacle? I'll bet there's been three hundred and four picnic parties about this very log; pleasant enough, but not real woods," and he glanced expectantly at Grant.

"Then we'll discuss *real* woods," responded the ex-runaway, gratified at the silence following the magic word. "George, did you give Perry my special message?"

"Yes, I told him to let Don know all about things."

"That's right," rejoined Grant, honestly, flushing slightly and tossing his head in such a comically characteristic manner that they all had a good laugh, and incidentally shattered what little reserve was

occasioned by the meeting. "You see I have a proposition to unfold to you this afternoon," he continued with more earnestness, "and I wanted you all to be made acquainted with my fiasco of last fall, before you fell in or fell out with my ideas. Deane and I have had this trip in mind for some time now, and when we finally decided on asking four more to join, which was last evening, we lost no time in letting you know, and suggesting this little chat."

"We're all ready for the news," remarked Don. "I've heard something of it, and I think it's great."

"Same here," said Billy, rapping sharply on the log with a stick. "Is any one contrary minded?"

"None! none! no one!" they cried at once.

"Then the meeting is called to order," responded the representative from Crooked Trail, grandly. "Mr. Burton, you have the ground."

"Thank you," smiled Grant, producing a well-worn oblong envelope from the inside pocket of his jacket. "The enclosed letter is from Jimmy Lander," he continued at once, "and as he isn't here to meet you, I will say that a boy never had a better friend. During my stay in the mountains, I lived with him, and he treated me right royally. We came as near saving each other's life as people ever do, I fancy,"—here his voice dropped perceptibly,— "and it was hard to part. His camp was on an

island in the lake, and you may take my word for it when I say that a prettier spot is seldom seen. However, I'll read you what he says, 'bouquets' and all:—

“LOS ANGELES, CAL., June 5, 189—.

“MY DEAR GRANT: Your letter reached me at the ranch yesterday, and I hasten to reply, so that you will be able to shape your summer plans accordingly. We are at present engaged in a general round-up, and I may not be able to come East before the end of July or the middle of August. I cannot tell you how much I regret this, nor how much I enjoyed your bright letters all winter and spring. I am afraid mine have indeed been dull ones by comparison. Thanks to your chum Deane, I have received copies of the school papers, and have read your articles with much pleasure. Your story on the silver fox and Squirrel Island brings back the old days, and tempts me to desert my work and spend the summer at the camp. But I am doing nicely here now, like the life, and though you may not believe it, have so fully recovered from my little fever that I weigh nearly one hundred and sixty pounds.

“Now, Grant, I want you to feel that you are absolutely free to make use of the island, camp, and lake whenever you like. Fix things to suit you and your friends any way you please. My lease does not, as you know, expire for two years, and I have written the law firm of Adams and Hull, at Milford, naming you as my representative.

“Jerry Quick will be glad I know to guide you, and you

can get the Tuttles or the Thedfords to assist you over the mountains.

"Just have a good time, Grant, and later on perhaps Master Bones and I will be on to see you. The old dog doesn't like California much — too hot for Boney. Speaking of Jerry and the dog reminds me to say that he sent me one of his quaint letters saying he thought we'd better have another "go" at the painter. The old rascal! he's probably shot it months ago, but uses this to lure me on. Ask him why his dog Crusty doesn't put it up a tree.

"When you get time, let me know what you've done. You will find everything just as we left it last fall. In the meanwhile, believe me as ever,

"Your faithful friend and comrade,

"JIMMY L."

"That sounds like business — good for Jim," commented Billy, as Grant passed the communication about. "I guess there's no panther in the woods, though," he added doubtfully.

Then Grant delivered himself, and arising, gave the story of his nocturnal meeting with the "King of the Ridge" so graphically that the group sat spell-bound before him. When he had finished none but the irrepressible Mr. Clarkson had anything to say.

"If the 'King,' as you call him, is still a reigning monarch, it's my opinion we can't dethrone him too quickly."

"Good for you, Billy!" cried George. "Grant, it's a great scheme."

"And we'll be a club like the Deer Lodge fellows," suggested Don. "What's the matter with calling ourselves the 'Squirrel Island Club'?"

"Capital! Squirrel Island say I!" cried Perry.

"And I!" from Deane and George.

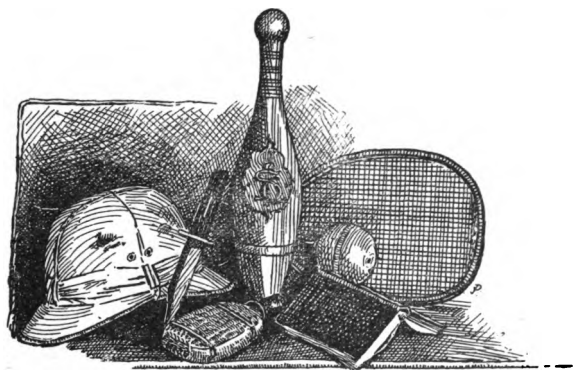
"It's carried," declared Grant, flushing with pleasure at the recollection of other days. "Now let's elect a secretary. I propose Don Southgate from the cultured city of Boston."

"You, Burton," quickly retorted Don, and in the same impromptu manner Grant was elected amid a storm of cheers.

"Wait till I get out my pencil and paper, or I'll get behind in my minutes," answered the new secretary, bringing to light a supply of stationery that he had purchased for the occasion. "Now go ahead and discuss some plans," he concluded, sharpening the lead.

The boys had a great deal to propose and consider, and talked with much earnestness and some good sense for the remainder of the day—for they were but schoolboys, mind you, and the oldest, Deane, was not much past his seventeenth birthday. When they finally arose and marched back two by two as far as Main Street, not only was the "Squirrel

Island Club" on a pretty firm basis, but a group of students, enjoying the midsummer evening before the commons, did not fail to notice that "something was up" among the whistling sextet that passed them gayly by.



CHAPTER III

A MIDNIGHT COUNCIL

WHEN Grant and Deane reached their dormitory after supper they had a feeling that things were decidedly going their way. It would not have been surprising to have had many objections raised to their somewhat immature plans, but the whole-souled manner with which they had been received left little doubt as to the probable outcome of the proposed outing.

Grant was right in presuming that the boys' parents would consent to whatever schemes seemed practical, and should the question of the "King" come up for discussion, it would be very easy to convince them that if left alone the old marauder would prove as harmless as a chipmunk. He trusted sincerely, however, that the subject would not arise, and that the club would not be hampered by any foolish promises — they seemed foolish to him then.

It was good to think that his father displayed a keen interest in the project, and the boy felt instinc-

tively that he could rely on his earnest support, if support were really needed. There was no good reason, though, why the club could not take care of itself, and he meant to propose a general subscription that would defray all expenses. Such were the soliloquies that occupied his mind while he and Deane sat by the open window enjoying the cool night air.

Later on he lay awake listening to the tree-toads and to the song of a nightingale. Presently he noted the soft twanging of a guitar mingling with the chorus, and then the low voice of a student humming a college song. He thought it all very pleasant, and recalled the fact that life had seemed very bitter eight months before. Well, he had been to blame then, and since he had done what seemed "the square thing," all had gone smoothly. He wondered if the Greyhound Club boys meant to spend their summer at Deer Lodge, and if they would find the hot prairies as pleasant as his friends were certain to find the cool mountain glades and the clear waters of Mink Lake. He could not but envy them their horses, but then, on the other hand, the lake offered great possibilities in the way of boating and fishing; and on the whole, he guessed things stood about even. Thus musing, he at last fell off into the land of nod.

But the student and guitar ceased only for a while,

then continued afresh. The voice grew gradually louder, finally breaking forth with the words:—

“The stag at eve had drunk his fill
Where danced the —”

Before the lines were finished Deane began to stir uneasily, while Grant awoke, heartily wishing the operetta would end. A gruff voice—old Butterfield’s—came down from the floor above, and had the effect of terminating the song with neither a moon nor a rill. There were moonbeams dancing on the elm boughs, though, and the sky was all studded with creamy stars. The sweet smell of summer drifted in though the casement, and the boy raised himself on his elbow to enjoy the lovely night. But he soon became aware of a muffled sound just above the window, and glancing up, caught sight of a heavy, dark cord dangling aimlessly across the double panes.

Now at any other time or place the watcher would most certainly have been disturbed if not badly frightened by this unusual proceeding. But the dormitories of large schools are often the scenes of harmless larks, and the students themselves soon grow to expect them.

This particular serpentine-like effect did not cause Grant to become even mildly flurried—the fellow

must have grown tired of his instrument and desired other recreation. But for all that he eyed the swinging rope, and presently observed a pair of bare legs rapidly descending along the line. It was assuredly becoming a mingling of the sublime with the ridiculous, and Grant resented it. He arose with a bound, ran across the floor to the window, and reaching out, grasped the bare ankles in a vicelike grip.

"See here, my friend, this is no gymnasium," he observed, dropping his elbows to the sill and thus effectually preventing the fellow from touching it. "What you want?"

"It's me," replied the gymnast, forgetting his grammar in the excitement of the moment. "Is that you, Grant? Let go and I'll come down."

"Who's *me*?" demanded the former, for the words had sounded husky.

"Billy Clarkson," came this answer, much louder.

Then Grant released his hold, and sure enough the Crooked Trail youth wriggled cleverly into the room.

"Of all things, Billy, what you tryin' to do? Just let me look you over," said Grant, noticing that Billy's costume was somewhat abbreviated — a pair of huge, padded foot-ball trousers and a tight, sleeveless jersey being all that struck the observer. Grant laughed aloud at the grotesque figure, and Deane yawned.

"What did you come down on?" asked the new

secretary, as Deane murmured a lazy greeting. "The clothes-line?"

"Aw, no," replied Billy, good-naturedly. "On my lariat, of course. I've been waiting for you to ask me down."

"Was that you singing all evening?"

"Sure. Didn't you know that was our room just above?"

"Yes, but I guess I forgot about it. I was so busy, thinking out plans for the club."

"So was I," pursued Billy, motioning for Deane to take the vacant chair by the window, which he did, thus bringing the trio into the moonlight. "Did you think of any new ones?"

"Oh, we might, I thought, get a cat-boat or two, don't you think?"

"Anything else?"

"And have clay-pigeon shoots."

"Any more?"

"Nothing worth proposing."

"Well, I've thought of a plan that I think is worth consideration," began Billy in reply. "You know, Grant, although I couldn't help chaffing you about your hard luck last fall," — Billy was ever considerate, — "I've often said that the time would come when you'd have a chance to show Walt Hillman and his friends that you were just as clever as you've found

them to be. And now that time has come!" concluded the speaker, earnestly.

"Has come? how?" inquired Deane, while Grant simply pondered.

"In the simplest manner. Here Grant has got his club formed, and the fellows are all downright enthusiastic — you should have heard George to-night, and Don at the supper table. From what I understand, there's plenty of room in the mountains, and a comfortable camp for the Deer Lodgers wouldn't be a great expense."

"That's a mighty good suggestion," remarked Deane, briskly, and Grant nodded his head approvingly.

"I'm not so sure they'd accept," ventured the latter. "They're a good set of fellows, and all that, but you know they're pretty fond of each other, and of their own society."

But Billy waved him to silence with an admonishing hand.

"Why, boys," he said, "there's no way for them to get around it, even if they wished to," and he fairly glowed with triumph. "My plan in the rough is this: Challenge them to a series of contests suitable to the time and country. Erect for their use a camp, and promise them a summer's glorious sport!"

"Billy, you always *were* a genius!" cried Grant,

in a voice he tried to make calm, while his roommate's eyes were dilated with the interest and attention he both felt and showed.

"Aw, now, drop that," and Billy sulked mildly. "But you see the best part of it is that it will keep us all alive, and there'll not be a dull moment all vacation. We might offer a prize to the club that captures the biggest specified fish, and one to the club that owns the fastest yacht, or the best dogs. Or we could make it a point for each event, the club having the majority at the completion of the schedule to carry away a suitable trophy."

"In other words, we'll be rivals!" exclaimed Deane, and the word somehow suited the boys exactly.

"Why not enter the panther as an event?" suggested Grant, smiling happily; "it's possible that some of us may shoot him. For my part, I'd like to settle with him for that scare he gave me last fall."

"Well, we'll wait till we hear from Harry Martin," said Billy, fearing that if his friends' enthusiasm continued to rise it would be hard to bear the disappointment of a refusal to the proposed invitation. "Now I must be going back. Have a good sleep, fellows, and to-morrow we can put it before the others and send it off."

"Anything you say," called the delighted secre-

tary, as Billy grasped the lasso and climbed out of sight as nimbly as any monkey that ever graced a man-of-war. The horse-hair presently followed its owner into the room above, and three very happy and excited lads soon tumbled back into bed.





CHAPTER IV

DEER LODGE ACCEPTS

"HURRAH, fellows! here's news indeed!" cried Harry Martin, appearing at the club room of the Deer Lodge boys with a businesslike-looking letter and envelope in either hand; "and it confirms all the late talk we've heard about Grant Burton's club. Guess what it is!"

"Couldn't," said Walter, promptly. "Give it here."

"Hands off," replied Harry, holding his chum at arm's length. "Eugene, you can guess."

"Not I."

"Jack?"

"Never good at guessing."

"You, Arthur," continued the first speaker, turning to his brother.

But the lad addressed maintained a thoughtful silence.

"Then it's left for you," pursued the jovial secretary, smiling down on Paul. "Come, little fellow, give us an answer."

"Oh, Grant wants to know about our lodge, as he intends building one," suggested Paul.

"All wrong," returned Harry, gleefully. "Fellows, it's a challenge!"

There was no suggestion of the melodramatic about this outburst of genuine enthusiasm, and the boys realized at once that Grant's proposition, whatever it was, would meet with favor; for when Harry's face actually glowed with excitement, as it did now, he invariably carried the day.*

"Stand back and I'll read," proceeded the secretary, smoothing the ruffled sheet. "Take notice it's written on the Squirrel Island Club's paper, dated this morning from Grant's dormitory, and addressed to 'yours truly,'" he explained, turning the epistle for the mere fraction of a second. "Now this is what follows the salutation:—

"On behalf of the Squirrel Island Club, I beg to extend to the members of the Greyhound Club an invitation to spend the approaching vacation at Mink Lake as the guests of the former organization.

"It is our intention, in the event of your accepting this invitation, to erect for your use a suitable camp on the east shore of the lake, which is in plain sight of the building we

propose to occupy on Squirrel Island ; to challenge you to a series of friendly contests on land and water, to be mutually arranged later ; and in short to do our best to give you a good time. Billy Clarkson proposed this invitation and challenge to Deane and me a few nights ago, and the other three members of our club fell in with our ideas at once. We sincerely trust that the known presence of a large panther in the vicinity of the lake, together with the fine possibilities for other sport, will influence you to do likewise.

"Hoping that you will for obvious reasons favor us with an early reply, believe me,

"Very respectfully yours,

"GRANT BURTON, *Sec'y.*"

"Heigh-ho! Grant's on the war trail, boys, and means to beat us," Walter began, as the Deer Lodgers eyed each other inquiringly. "Let's give him the chance."

"Yes, let's do it ; it would be a great change after the prairies, and lots of fun," chimed in Eugene. "And they'll be no end generous and plucky rivals."

"What does he mean by 'friendly contests'?" asked Jack, who grew enthusiastic by degrees.

"Why, boat races, grouse-shooting, anything like that," explained Harry. "We don't know exactly yet. We've got to accept first."

"Pshaw! I'm afraid it would be a one-sided affair,"

remarked Arthur. "Why, Harry, Walt and you can outshoot any two in that set."

"I don't know about that," replied Walter, dubiously. "Billy's a good shot with a rifle."

"And I'm sure Perry Langdon is a fair oarsman, if they introduce rowing. And I'd like to know who can beat Deane Cumnor swimming?" demanded Paul.

"That's so, fellows," continued Harry, in explanation. "You see we didn't do much but ride and shoot last summer, and it's my opinion that when it comes to climbing mountains or to aquatic sports, we'll find that they'll make rivals with a capital R. So, on the whole, do you think we'd better accept?" he asked roguishly.

"Yes, accept! accept!" cried several in chorus.

"Then here she goes," and Harry took up a pen from the centre-table.

As was to be expected, he received many unsolicited suggestions, and was interrupted times enough to anger any mortal boy under ordinary circumstances; but on this occasion Harry was so pleased with a sense of victory that not even an occasional jarring of the table caused him to frown in mild displeasure. So much ardor on the part of the rival secretaries seemed certainly an excellent omen.

At last the envelope containing the acceptance

was sealed and addressed, and Harry, leaving the club room with it, went over to the commons, where he knew he would be likely to find a student willing to deliver the communication for a small consideration. Just why he did this would be hard to say. He could just as well have walked down to Butterfield's himself, but engaging a messenger seemed to add importance to the delivery, and he did what nine out of ten other boys would have done under the same conditions.

It chanced that Grant and Deane were busy rehearsing for the academy commencement when the letter was handed in. The former tore it open with trembling fingers, scanned it eagerly a brief moment, then smiled so happily that his classmate could not fail to guess the tenor of the note. As soon as he had read and re-read it to his satisfaction, he crossed the room and tossed it before Deane; but it was with a very different manner and expression of countenance from that which he had displayed on a certain occasion the previous autumn, when he had in an unreasonable spirit of pique thrown the first of Harry Martin's letters to his chum.

Both boys remembered that occurrence as we often remember the disagreeable things of life, but neither referred to it. Each was thinking and about to say, though, that it had been a lucky mishap, not only for

Grant's sake, but because it now began to look as if the summer's outing would prove one of the most exciting and pleasurable experiences of their young lives.

"Well, we've got it all as we hoped to have it," commented Deane, seriously. "Now, what's the next move?"

"Here, you go and hunt up the fellows, and show them Harry's reply," answered Grant without hesitation, as he handed the letter to his chum; "no use of calling a meeting for that. I've got to write about a dozen letters, so don't come back this afternoon," and the islanders' secretary produced from a lower drawer of his desk paper enough to supply a business college for a fortnight.

So Deane went his way, while Grant first of all directed half a dozen envelopes — one to his father, one to Jimmy Lander, and another to Adams and Hull, requesting them to advertise for builders' contracts for the extra camp, for as the reader has inferred from Grant's letter to Harry, he and his friends had decided to occupy Jimmy Lander's camp at the south end of the island; a fourth was directed to Grant's old friend, Hammie Tuttle, while the fifth and sixth contained the names of Tim Anderson, the quarryman, and Jerry Quick, the famous Blue Ridge trapper.

When Grant had finished and mailed the six letters, he felt that he had at least made a start, but fully realized how much was left to do.

The selection and arrangement of the contests, with the few simple rules obviously required to govern the clubs, were the cause of much friendly discussion. Frequent meetings were held in different places, at which the twelve lads debated earnestly. Other students, idling about here and there in the woodlands, soon got wind of the clubs' intentions, and about a week before the closing of school the *Phillipian* printed a half-column criticism on the folly of the undertaking — the work, it is needless to say, of an envious schoolmate with a little editorial influence. There seemed to be but few to agree with this much-disturbed contributor, however, and the boys soon found that many were very anxious to join them, looking upon the venture as the greatest novelty of the year.

When the by-laws and schedule were finally drawn up to the satisfaction of both clubs, and had been voted upon and unanimously adopted, which was during the ensuing week of commencement, Grant forwarded the following august and inspiring copy to a Boston printer, with the request that it be printed and bound in a neat little pamphlet at the earliest possible moment: —

RULES, REGULATIONS, AND BY-LAWS
OF THE

RIVAL BOY SPORTSMEN ASSOCIATION.

(Greyhound Club—Squirrel Island Club.)

I

This association shall be known as the "Rival Boy Sportsmen Association."

II

There shall be an appropriate association banner, to be selected by a committee of four, and to be displayed as stated hereafter.

III

The association for the season of 189- to consist of two members, viz. : (a) The "Greyhound Club" of Deer Lodge (colors brown and blue) and the "Squirrel Island Club" of Mink Lake (colors scarlet and white). (b) Each organization to consist of six sub-members. (c) The dues for the present season shall be fifty dollars (\$50) from each sub-member, to be held and expended by the secretaries of the respective clubs.

IV

The objects of this association are : (a) To promote good fellowship among its members. (b) To develop the science

D

of woodcraft. (c) To protect all fish and game from indiscriminate and ignoble slaughter, and to uphold the game laws.

V

The Greyhound Club having accepted an informal challenge from the Squirrel Island Club to a series of contests to be held at Mink Lake during the present summer, it is hereby mutually agreed that seven events shall be contested, according to the appended By-laws : —

I

The contestants must be members of the association.

2

Not more than two entries from each club will be received, except in events one, two, and three, hereafter described.

3

A club successful in an event shall be allowed the privilege of flying the association banner until unsuccessful in a subsequent event, when it shall be delivered by the losing club to its opponent.

4

Club flags to be raised at eight o'clock, and lowered at sunset.

5

Appropriate medals will be awarded to the winners in each event, said medals to be selected by a chosen committee, and paid for from the association treasury.

6

All disputes to be settled by an arbitration committee of two from each club, or should this committee fail to agree, by the presiding referee, whose decision shall in all cases be final.

7

All contests to be decided by referee and umpires, to be selected later, and from whose decisions there shall be no appeal.

VI

The following seven events, subject to change by mutual agreement only, have been selected as the most likely to afford an amusing and exciting rivalry, the club capturing the majority to receive the association banner as its personal property, together with the year's championship : —

I

The club capturing in a sportsmanlike manner the largest brook or speckled trout (*Salmo fontinalis*) during the season prescribed by law, to be credited with a victory. No net, snare, or contrivance other than rod, line, etc., to be used by the angler, and no streams other than the out-

lets or inlets of Mink Lake to be fished for this prize. Size and weight of fish noted by secretaries on request.

2

The club capturing by any method whatsoever the largest wild specimen of the cat family, the wild cat (*Felis rufus*), and panther, commonly called cougar, puma, painter, mountain lion, or catamount (*Felis* or *Puma concolor*), being very destructive to deer, hares, rabbits, ruffed grouse and other small game, — to be credited with a victory.

All sub-members eligible to enter the above contests, according to Section 2 of By-law V.

3

The club showing the best-trained and handsomest brace of dogs — setters or pointers — at field trials to be hereafter arranged and held on ruffed grouse, commonly called partridge or pheasant (*Bonasia umbellus*), to be credited with a victory. One sub-member to handle each brace. All dogs to have been trained by sub-members, without outside assistance.

4

The club winning the best two in three clay-pigeon matches of twenty-five birds to each contestant, fifteen yards' rise, to be credited with a victory. Number twelve gauge guns to be used ; size of shot, number seven, one and one-eighth ounces ; drams of powder, optional.

5

The club capturing the best two in three races for twenty-foot cat-boats to be credited with a victory. One boat to a club, two sub-members to a boat. The course to be determined later.

6

The club capturing the two-mile single-scul race, over a course to be determined later, to be credited with a victory. Choice of boat optional.

7

The club reading or reciting the best original paper on natural history, hunting story or verse suggesting outdoor life, at the close of the outing, to be credited with a victory.

VII

Judges, referees, and umpires to be chosen by vote.

VIII

The above schedule to be carried out regardless of the number of victories or defeats gained or suffered by either club.

IX

Sunday to be a day of rest, visiting, and quiet pleasures.

X

The association desires to express its hearty thanks to Mr. James Lander for the very generous hospitality he has

shown, and sincerely trusts that the cares of California ranch-life will not prevent him from spending at least a part of the summer at his old shooting-box on Squirrel Island.

HARRY MARTIN,
Sec'y Greyhound Club.

GRANT BURTON,
Sec'y Squirrel Island Club.

ANDOVER, MASS., June 28, 189-.

Then followed the twelve full names of the boys.

As the young knight of the composing-stick ran his practised eye over the papers, he began to be a little interested. This sort of document was very unlike the usual run of small orders, such as hand-bills for "sandwich-men," or dry goods announcements; but, after some hesitation, the prosaic compositor fell to work with a will, looking up pretty vignettes, suggestive of woodland and stream, and making, in the remaining half-day, a dainty booklet, with a happy mingling of red and blue ink on a brown and white cover. They were struck off the following morning, and the boys received them, to their joyful surprise, at noon the next day. But this was not all.

General Burton had written his grandson that he would meet the lads, if they so desired, at Providence, and would be honored to take them in his son's yacht

to New York. The boys were delighted at this proposal, as many of them had never enjoyed even so much as a brief cruise aboard a floating palace. It was no new thing to Grant, Harry, and Perry, however, and these, accompanied by Eugene, decided to go on to New York by rail, see to the matter of supplies, and, perhaps, make arrangements for the pur-



chase of the cat-boats, racing shells, and a small gig or two—something handy to knock about the lake in.

After the closing exercises, they left the old town as planned, leaving their chums cheering briskly upon the station platform. That night they reached the metropolis, spent a quiet Sunday with Perry at the Langdon house on Riverside, and awoke Monday morning full of life and hope, determined to discharge their many important commissions satisfactorily to all

concerned; but before sunset a wholly unexpected event took place that all but wrecked the calculations of the young sportsmen, and caused one of their number to spend a very miserable day and night in sight of his own home.

CHAPTER V

A RIVER PAVILION

BEFORE nine o'clock that memorable Monday, the boys left the Langdon mansion and walked down the asphalt path to the iron gate that opened upon Riverside Drive. Kelly, the gardener, was busy mowing the lawn, and the buzzing of the machine mingled with the continuous chirping of the sparrows in the ivy and maples. The river breeze was refreshing, and the long, winding, white street looked inviting enough; so the four lads strolled leisurely onward, discussing the day's work.

"I think Eugene and I could get the supplies all right," said Grant, as they paused at the third corner. "And you, Harry, might go down to Daly's and make inquiries about the shells. Perry knows the river from end to end, and can happen along till he finds a couple of cat-boats."

"Yes," admitted Perry, "I have no doubt I could get some cheap boats. Of course I won't engage anything till you pass on them."

"We'll take your word for them," smiled Harry. "I fancy they'll be pretty heavy for fresh-water sailing, anyway."

"We could make it a drifting match, then," suggested Eugene.

"No fear of that," retorted Perry, who prided himself on his knowledge of things nautical. "Since the wheeling craze arrived, all sorts of boats have been dirt cheap," he explained, glancing a bit contemptuously at the string of cyclists that whirled steadily past.

"I hope so," said Harry, "for we'll have to pay well even for second-hand shells, and six hundred dollars won't cover everything."

"It will go a long way," replied Grant, cheerfully. "Let's go over to Columbus Avenue and take the Elevated."

So the boys turned mechanically to their left, walking up the street in the direction of Central Park. Perry accompanied them to the station, then started back toward the river. He noticed as he passed along that the houses were nearly all closed and boarded for the summer. He was glad that his mother and sister were about to leave for the Adirondacks, but realized why they had not gone before, and was very grateful. But then it was very pleasant by the river, as he presently became aware

on crossing the drive and leaning over the granite wall.

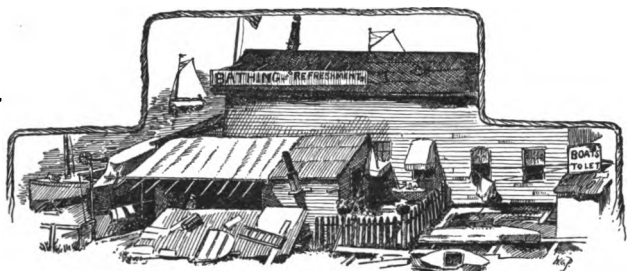
A line of two-masted schooners, their decks red with brick cargoes, fluttered idly in the light breeze and slack tide. Now and then a sail would darken and flash in the sunshine, or farther up a yawl would make slowly along the shore, threading its way among the countless craft that swung idly at the yacht club's anchorage.

Perry continued up the hill, always directing his gaze to the river. He scarcely glanced at a natty, gray-coated policeman who was flirting with a pretty maid, and incidentally chucking the baby under the chin with his club, to the little one's huge delight; nor did he turn to watch for more than a passing moment the gay equipages and gorgeous yellow drag that jingled and clattered up the slope. He presently noticed a couple of sail-boats lying tilted on a strip of brown sand close to the railroad. "The very thing," he thought, and wound his way down the bank, pausing on the ledge top.

Now for many years Perry had known a number of the river men, who were quick to appreciate and remember a good customer; and though his father had long been a patron of the neighboring club, the boy had always been fonder of spending his leisure hours on tours of investigation along the ever-inter-

esting shore. It seemed a long while since he had enjoyed such a ramble, or had bought his "bolivar" and root-beer as became a frequenter of the bathing and boating pavilions. He would combine business with pleasure, and spend the forenoon visiting his old playground.

Seeing that the boats he had observed were too large to consider purchasing, if indeed they were for



THE PAVILION

sale, he turned his attention to the near pavilion. It seemed rather more picturesque than its neighbors, and must certainly have been there longer, for its roof of tarred paper, surmounted by a generous sign bearing the words "Bathing and Refreshments," poorly lettered, bore unmistakable signs of age. Yet Perry could not recall ever having visited the place, though it had a familiar look.

He continued to survey it, noting many things at random : the national flag floated from a pole at the south end ; a couple of discarded canoes, one evidently the work of a small boy, lay upon friendly beams that stretched from the shore wall to the pavilion foundation ; bedding hung to air on a wire that ran past the windows on the right ; a small yard, just off the tiny kitchen, was enclosed by a red fence, crowned with little tubs of geranium, while against the house a long box of flowers bloomed finely ; a Newport and a Cape Cod cat-boat, both unfinished, stood close to the main entrance, which consisted of a cinder path and plank walk leading from the railroad under a fine, new, white awning ; two dark chimneys, of no particular design, rose from the structure, one pointing north, the other south ; a ragged canvas sign, with "Boats to Let" painted upon it in the same uncertain letters, adorned the roof of a shed, where a car-coupler lay basking in the sunshine ; bits of wreckage, ladders, and cabin roofs were strewed about the entrance, where a tiny windmill creaked industriously. There was something very attractive in all this, and in the impression of indefinite prosperity the observer got, especially when he discovered that the building had a decided list to port, and must have been constructed upon an abandoned freight barge.

Presently a cat-boat went skimming past the outer float; another stood in, spilled its sail, and glided up to the wharf. A young boy came out of the shadow, hung several towels on a convenient line, then stood with his hands in his pockets, looking up at Perry.

"I say," called the latter, noticing that the lad had about him a certain smack of the sea, "got any twenty-foot 'cats' for sale?"

"Shouldn't wonder," came the laconic reply.

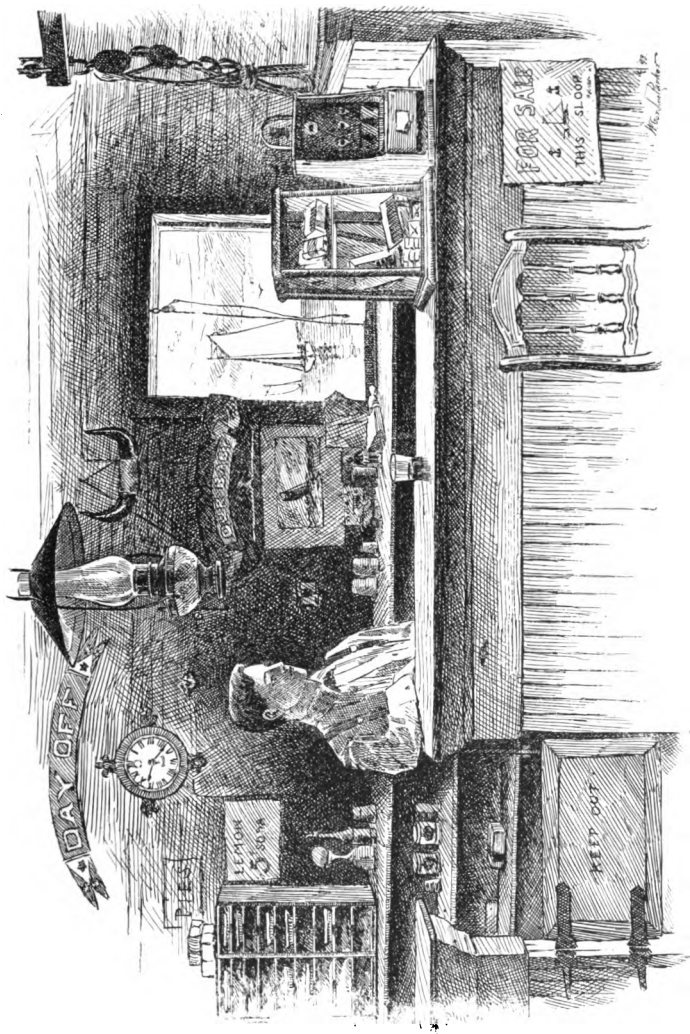
"Cheap?"

"We don't give them away."

"You're quite a joker, aren't you?" shouted Perry, unwilling to be chaffed by the youngster. "Guess I'll come down and see you." So saying, he turned into the steep path, crossed the tracks, and soon reached the doorway. The boy had disappeared, but Perry promptly followed him in, unmindful of the chorus of angry growls that issued from every barrel and box containing a dog—and they all seemed to.

"You seem to be pretty well guarded," he observed, addressing a bronzed young fellow who stood behind a little counter on the left, looking through an open door.

"Oh, yes," replied the lad, smiling amiably; "it's most like a kennel show, but they're not all ours—two or three belong to customers who are off in the country. We only keep four."



A YOUNG FELLOW STOOD BEHIND A COUNTER, Page 46.

"That's a nice number," said Perry, not altogether sincerely. "I've got two myself, and they're great company."

"A chap needs company on a morning like this," he replied, in evident disgust. "I had two tickets for the Alderman Clancy Association outing at Coney Island to-day, but dad took ma with him, and of course Toby and I stay home to run the business — and that ain't much after the Sunday rush."

"Was that Toby I saw from the hill-top?" asked the schoolboy, settling back into a comfortable chair and surveying the delightful interior, decorated as it was with the backboards of the "Day off" and "Our Baby," — names more suggestive than elegant, — a chewing-gum machine, a cigar case, a cheap picture of a sloop in a gale, a large swinging lamp, and a tempting case of pies. A block and fall above the refrigerator strongly suggested old ocean, while a butterfly, and a tiny pair of buffalo horns, incongruous as they were, verily seemed a part of this unique little room.

"Toby can't get over the excursion," explained the youth, in lieu of an apology for his brother. "Did you say you wanted a twenty-footer?"

"I'd like to look at some," answered Perry, stretching out his legs. "I might buy a couple of speedy ones, for fresh-water sailing."

"Nothing fast around here," was the decided rejoinder. "That sloop there," pointing to a placard tacked to the counter, "belongs to a customer; he wants sixty dollars for her."

"Let's look her over," was the next proposition, and the two left the little shop together, walking the bridge to the float, which smelt strongly of tar and was littered with coils of rope, oars, and row-boats in various stages of repair.

"There she is," exclaimed the young boatman, proudly, as he nodded toward the sloop. "She'll go well in light weather, I'll warrant. Hi, Toby! bring in the dory!"

On hearing his brother, Toby, who had been larking with a couple of bosom friends up the river, struck out toward the little boat. He soon came up with it, splashing in over the starboard side. The slack ebb-tide carried him to the landing, while his companions alternately swam or floated slowly past with the current, perhaps for half a mile, to walk back along the railroad.

In the meantime Perry had made up his mind that the sloop was out of the question; she was rather old, he could see, too large, and wanting a topmast; and though the flaring sailor's trousers that hung across the boom above the traveller suggested present occupancy, he felt she would prove a bad investment, per-

haps "a little damp downstairs." So he ended the subject by saying, rather abruptly, "It's no use going aboard. She isn't just what I want."

"You're the captain," returned the river boy, as Toby boarded the float — a freckled, sunburned little chap, as lively as a cricket.

"Say, Tom, ain't Sylvestre's *Bertha* for sale?" he inquired of his brother, climbing the tower ladder and diving fearlessly from the top, a distance of ten feet or more — this to impress the visitor.

"That's so," reflected Tommy, lifting his eyes to the Jersey shore. "There's a contractor living at the top of the hill, yonder, who owns a trim little twenty-footer — she's fast and sound, but a bit cranky. He uses her to cross the river, and often stands in double-reefed, with no more'n a sprinklin' of dust to show for it."

"How do you know she's cranky?"

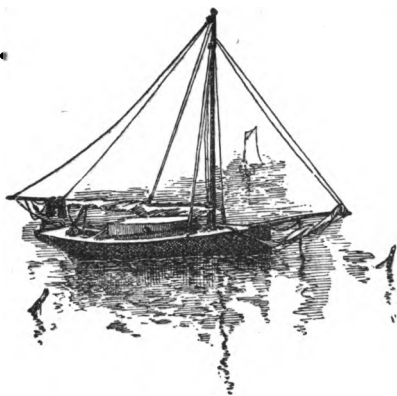
"They say so. I never handled her in a blow. She must be anchored, now, by the oil company's dock; but you can't tell from here."

"If she's fast I'd like to *look* at her," replied Perry, discreetly, after a little consideration, thinking that a spill in Mink Lake would be preferable to a ducking in these brown waters, where mangled moss-bunkers and eels, struck by the wheels of the great river boats, floated down stream with other refuse. "Can you take me over?"

■

"Not now," answered Tom, as the canine members of the pavilion announced a customer. "Toby, run over to Jem's and get one of the boys."

Toby entered the dory with alacrity and pulled down the river, clearly anxious to have Perry admire his oarsmanship. When he was out of sight, the latter followed the elder brother to the shop, where,



ordering a "bolivar" and a glass of root-beer, he amused himself watching Tommy fit out a couple of cruising parties with pies, canned tomatoes, bread, meats from the ice-box, and soft drinks. All sorts of craft glided across the open window, and the time did not, you may be sure, drag heavily. In fact, Perry was rather sorry to hear Toby's shrill treble

voice hailing them from without. He rose to his feet and went down to the float, where his eyes fell upon two men in a small sloop, which Toby held to the raft by the bowsprit.

"Goin' over to Sylvestre's?" asked the larger of the two strangers, a man of perhaps forty, whose face had been browned by exposure to sun and wind. "I know the house, and'll take you across for a quarter."

"Very well," said Perry, without further ado, stepping to the deck and thence to the little seat that half-circled the cockpit. By a great effort Toby pushed the sloop off, and presently, the sails filling, she leaned to the breeze, dancing merrily over the waves.

CHAPTER VI

PERRY OUTWITS CAPTAIN VAL



KIDDY

THE sloop had no sooner got clear of the outlying craft than the portly helmsman spoke to his companion, who lowered the centre-board a trifle, and took a turn round the ratchet with the sheet. The tide was nearly slack on the ebb, and a good wind blew up the river. The little vessel stood straight for the Jersey shore, gliding crisply along, now and again dousing her scuppers so thoroughly that Perry moved to the weather side, preferring an occasional sprinkling of spume to the possibility of an upset.

Keeping his back to the bow, he casually turned his thoughts to the boatmen. He saw that the skipper's companion was a stout young fellow of perhaps twenty-two, with a clean-shaven, clear-cut face—rather good-looking, on the whole, but with a certain

suggestion of craftiness about the shrewd, deliberate gaze that met you. His head-gear consisted, oddly enough, of a broad-brimmed cowboy hat, which looked at home above the waving brown hair. He, too, was well tanned, and though somewhat smaller than the man at the helm, Perry judged him to be the stronger; for there was no trace of superfluous flesh about him, even the muscles of his face and neck being well defined and indicative of unusual force and activity.

"You've been along the river some time?" inquired the schoolboy, addressing the skipper as he finished his observation. "You make the *Summer Sea* move along in great shape," he added indulgently, having noticed the name on the coamings beneath the tiller.

"Well, she don't act like she was breakin' out her mud-hook," replied the man, with a friendly grimace, dropping his double chin to light a pipe in the lee of his raised lapel. He did not relinquish the helm altogether during this operation, and the vessel did not veer an iota from her course. "You see," he concluded, flinging the burnt match to leeward, "she's a pretty spry old lady herself; but if you're lookin' for a twenty-foot 'cat,' I reckon Sylvestre's your man."

"That's what they told me," said Perry. "Just where does this Sylvestre live?"

"Up on the hill, in a house they calls 'Washington's

Headquarters.' I don't know that George ever let go his anchor in that there buildin', but I'll swear it's had a world of time to tumble in, if it's ever goin' to. Hey, Kiddy?"

"That's no lie," answered that worthy, promptly. "Nobody but a 'dago' would live there."

"So Sylvestre's an Italian," commented Perry, thinking that the commander and the crew of the *Summer Sea* were not the most prosaic people in the world. "Is he prosperous?"

"Mightily so," said the big skipper. Then, blustering up a bit, he added: "And why wouldn't he be? As near as I can reck', he clears a tidy sum every day of his life. Why, come to think of it, there ain't no man about him!"

"Right again, Val," and Kiddy accentuated his words with a brisk rap.

"What are his great faults?" inquired Perry, fancying that he detected an odor of sour grapes in the men's talk, and also wishing to hear all he could before they ran up to the wharf.

"In the first place," began Captain Val, chafing his hands, "he preys on his countrymen like a hawk on a band of motherless chicks: charges them outrageous for cots in his old ramshackle buildings up there on the rocks; charges for gettin' 'em work, and for crossin' the river; business so good he's got him-

self a hot-air launch, and wants to get rid of the *Bertha*; that's why you get a chance to buy."

"I see," said Perry, thoughtfully, putting Sylvestre down for a very enterprising colonist.

The *Summer Sea* presently glided up to the pier, where the water lay calm with the gleam of oil. Captain Val made a very neat landing. Perry, being nearest the bow, stepped out first, Kiddy following. Then the schoolboy thought of the passage money.

"Have you got any change?" he asked, innocently displaying the little roll of bills that Grant had thrust into his hand at the Elevated.

"I'm a bit shy on silver, I am," responded the skipper, mechanically slapping the pockets of his jacket. "Kiddy, can you break a fiver?"

"Ho, ho, Val Creedon! Ain't seen so much money since I left the 'Tail O' outfit," said Kiddy, laughing harshly. But when the boy's back was turned, Val winked knowingly at the speaker, and the laughter ceased at once.

"Well, there she swings, the *Bertha G.*!" exclaimed Creedon, pointing to the object of their visit. "Bar-rin', as I've heard tell, a likin' to feel giddy, I do say she's as trim a shell as you'll find along these shores."

"She looks it," replied the lad, heartily, struck by

the boat's graceful lines and generally racy appearance. "Perhaps her ballast is off."

"That's so," assented Creedon, leering at the white hull. "Who knows? But, now, no 'balcony yachtsman' would have remarked it—eh, Kiddy? I mistrust you have an uncommon large knowledge of boats," he concluded artfully, looking straight at Perry, with mild surprise in his comical little eyes.

The boy knew that the term "balcony yachtsman" was often applied to owners who did most of their cruising from the club-house balconies, while the blue pennants fluttered from the mainmasts of their anchored craft. He was pleased to know he did not seem the "balcony yachtsman," even though he wore trousers of white duck; so he suggested, amiably enough, —

"As I don't know the house, perhaps one of you had better come along with me."

"We'll both go," readily agreed the captain. "I can point it out from the top of the ledge there."

"Well, come on—the sun's getting high," said Perry, crossing the dusty road and relinquishing the lead to Val, who at once struck into the well-worn path leading to the cliffs above. These great ledges are really the spurs of the famous Palisades, but of late years have suffered through the vandalism of greedy contractors; and though in some places

fringes of high cliff greet the eye from the river, great masses of rock have in many instances been removed from behind these, thus presenting the long-suffering public with the oddity of a false front. An old stone-crushing mill and a sprinkling of cosey Italian cottages, each with its thrifty garden, were the only buildings south of the hamlet behind the oil pier. The vicinity seemed almost deserted.

Captain Creedon was forced to pause in the ascent to catch his breath, thus giving Perry a chance to look out through the underbrush. All he saw across the shining water bespoke industry and progress, contrasting strangely with the slumbering region about them. Under the bright sun this favored part of the metropolis looked positively dazzling. The white tomb where sleeps a nation's hero stood out clear against its background of young trees and blue sky; nearer on the heights of Morningside rose the dome of the Columbia Library and St. Luke's Hospital; buildings white, brown, and red,—mansions, apartment houses, long blocks of dwellings, a buff-colored school,—added to the general suggestion of brilliancy.

The pavilions and yacht-club houses, with their fleets of small craft, were plainly visible; but they looked small and rather insignificant below the rows of stately dwellings on Riverside. Perry cast his

eyes toward the heart of the city, where a thousand and one factory pipes reared their smoking black tops; while further in the direction of the Battery, buildings of twenty-five stories towered serenely above the throbbing town.

"It's a great place," observed Creedon, as the boy continued to gaze eastward. "It suits me fust rate, and I've been sailin' round it nigh forty years, and reckon to scud round forty more. I was borned on the water, I was. That's what makes me the sailor I am."

"You certainly understand the river, Captain Creedon," said Perry, approvingly. "Have you ever commanded a vessel larger than the *Summer Sea*?"

"I once took a mud-scow to Catskill," was the droll response.

"Didn't you bring her back?" rejoined Perry.

"No, I didn't," retorted Val, "nor nobody else did."

"How was that?"

"I sunk her in the river there," replied the man, sheepishly; "the charts was wrong."

Perry could not restrain a laugh, and even Kiddy, who had been silently puffing at a cheroot, smiled grimly. "That reminds me of a puncher I knew on the 'Turkey Track' range," said he. "He took a

bunch of the old man's steers to town, and didn't come back because the market was good."

"Sold him out and skipped, hey!" laughed Creedon. "Well, he done just right."

"That's what he did; like enough the old man had rustled the bunch," was Kiddy's sullen comment.

Talk of this kind had no attraction for the Andover boy, who straightway turned on his heel and started briskly up the hill, the others following leisurely. They came to a lonely house at the summit—a great, gray, ramshackle structure that partly overhung an abandoned quarry. A grand old elm and some apple trees surrounded three sides of the building. The grass in the orchard grew thick, and the air was filled with the chirping of insects and sparrows or the distant tooting of a river boat.

"Is this the haunted house?" asked Perry, going to the edge of the cliff and looking down to the shore. "Nobody living here?"

"The rats has left the ship long ago," replied Creedon, significantly. "They got undermining this bootiful structure till the 'dagos' won't live here. It's a dead loss to Sylvestre."

"It ain't no ways safe," added Kiddy. "A thousand-pound steer could hook it into the gorge yonder."

"It must have been a pleasant place in its day," said Perry, noticing a pretty tower. "Now, which is the way to Sylvestre's?"

"Through the trees there," and the skipper pointed. "I declare to goodness I'm that fagged out I can't pilot you no farther. Kiddy and me'll have a quiet smoke here while you can go and dicker for the *Bertha*."



SYLVESTRE'S HEADQUARTERS

"Oh, that's all right," replied Perry, cheerfully, starting off.

The house was indeed a veritable "Washington's Headquarters," sadly worn with age. The roof was frayed and patched, the stones in the walls were crumbling, while the windows and door had settled till they leaned picturesquely. The outbuildings of tarred paper clearly suggested the Italian peasant. Little wine gardens were arranged on either side, strings of red and green peppers hung from the awnings, yellow crocks of earthenware, filled with garlic,

stood under a honeysuckle vine, and a dainty butterfly-net waved in the breeze.

As Perry advanced he noticed a little girl peeping into a bird-cage by the entrance. He hailed her, but on catching sight of him, she vanished through the open door — it seemed that little folks were unusually shy. He therefore mounted the rickety steps and knocked once, twice. Presently Signora Sylvestre appeared. She was a type of the Italian housewife, with straight black hair parted in the middle, a swarthy complexion, and great, sorrowful, brown eyes.

“Luigi, he sell the little boat to-day — this mornin’, signor,” she explained, when the lad had made his errand known.

Perry bit his lip in vexation. “I’m sorry,” said he, “that I’m late.”

“Yes, signor,” and as the boy raised his cap, she silently withdrew.

“Now, that’s awkward,” soliloquized the prospective purchaser, turning his back upon the “head-quarters.”

“I’ll have to engage these men to show me around. I believe a boat’s like a horse: you can’t find what you want when you’re ready to buy.”

He strolled on through the orchard, little dreaming what a reception Val Creedon and his partner

had planned during the quarter-hour he had been absent. As he neared the deserted gray house he was conscious that the men had left the rustic bench by the well, and stood for a moment as if in doubt whether he had passed them on the road. This, however, was obviously impossible. He went over to the cliff, thinking perhaps they had returned to await him at the jetty. He began to feel a trifle nervous, he could not say why; he felt that something was moving behind him, he thought he heard rustling in the grass. Turning quickly, he caught a glimpse of Val Creedon striding toward him, his face flushed and his thick lips twitching. Almost at the same moment the lad heard a singing in the air, and dodged instinctively, but not quickly enough to avert the swift, sure coil of a half-inch rope. The next second he was jerked roughly to the ground, and heard Kiddy shouting orders to his captain.

Perry has often said since that he thought of a dozen things in that brief moment. Val's malevolent expression had told him that the men were in deadly earnest, and meant to best him at all hazards. He kept his head sufficiently well to realize that he had fallen in the worst possible position, for it would have been foolhardy to have jumped from the cliff; the house was at his back, its front overhanging the quarry gorge; Val was closing on him from the third

quarter, while Kiddy kept throwing him to his feet with marvellous skill on the fourth side. As all these facts flashed through his brain, Perry caught sight of a low window, partially boarded, close to the brink of the cliff, just behind him. Kiddy, in his alarm at big Val's sluggish movements, now rushed in, making the fatal mistake of dropping the rope's end. Before he had taken his third step, Perry, accepting the desperate chance the window offered, crashed through the thin wooden panes, tumbling in upon the dusty floor with a great clatter. Kiddy did not follow. Grasping the trailing rope, he drew back, in the hope of holding the lad from the outside. But Perry had slipped from the noose with the agility of a gymnast, and Kiddy measured his own length upon the ground, striking his head a sharp rap against the corner of the well.

The boy stood panting in the dim light of the musty room, a hundred fears and hopes crowding his brain. His heart beat wildly; it seemed as if it must draw the men to him. As his eyes became accustomed to the light he noted a hallway at his left. Should he keep them from entering the window, or should he try to escape through the passage? The question soon solved itself, for presently he heard the sound of falling boards and the stealthy, hollow tramping of feet at the far end of the building.

Then Kiddy peered through the window, swearing volubly.

“Cornered!” gasped Perry, gliding as noiselessly as possible down the dark hall, resolved to outwit the miscreants at any cost.

CHAPTER VII

KIDNAPPED



THE passage into which Perry had so hastily turned led to the rear vestibule. The old floor would creak and groan in spite of his deft, light footsteps, and had Creedon thought to pause a moment, he would have heard Perry crossing the wide hall on the river side. As it was, Captain Val was so thoroughly alarmed at the schoolboy's plucky escape that he blundered sluggishly through

the dimly lighted rooms, evidently not realizing that Perry was moving under cover of the noise.

The boy dropped to his hands and knees, behind an old box, as soon as he had crossed the large rear

hallway, and when Val, who in his excitement did not notice Perry's tracks in the dust and dirt, had turned to the right, he — Perry — began to crawl along on all fours through the small passage corresponding to the one from which he had just emerged. A beam of light fell slantwise across his path not far in advance, and on reaching it he perceived that a short stairway led to the floor above. He disliked the idea of leaving the main floor, and then reproached himself for not having taken Crendon's back track, at the end of which he would have been certain to have found an exit. But no! the rooms through which the man had come were doubtless very dark, judging from the time he had consumed and the noise he had made, and after all, perhaps Kiddy had left his place at the window, and was at that moment guarding Val's entrance. Assuredly, then, it would be better to look well before leaping; so he cautiously climbed the stairs in the hope of finding a window from which to drop when the men should be heard searching below.

Several rooms led from the little square at the top of the flight. They were much lighter than those below, for there were occasional rents in the old walls. A discarded stove and cooking utensils, a broken chair and straw bedding were piled at random in stray corners; but everything of any value

had gone with Sylvestre's grasping lodgers, even to the locks and hinges of the doors. Perry noted this last fact with a quick-drawn breath, for he had seen at the first glance that the windows were securely boarded. Luckily, the doors had not been carried away nor used for fire-wood. One stood close to the stairs. He soon made up his mind in the event of a further attack, to pile them on the floor over the stairs, heaping on all else of any weight he could find ready to hand. This, he thought, would effectually block the way, for a time at least. First, however, he rushed to the nearest window, and getting his fingers behind a broken board, drew back with all his strength. It gave slightly, but the fear that he might be caught in a trap discouraged perseverance, and he returned on tiptoe to the head of the stairs, as silent as a mouse.

But no sounds came up from below, for the rascals were at that moment in quiet consultation.

"They mean to rob me of this money," soliloquized the lad, brushing the perspiration from his brow with a hand that trembled like an aspen. "What a fool I've been! If I'd gone on about my business this morning, instead of loafing about the Geggus pavilion, I'd have avoided this scrape. Hem! it's lucky for me that Creedon trusted to a rope at six yards instead of a handspike at six feet," and he

rubbed his head in a droll, significant way. "But they'll *not* get a red cent," he continued with emphasis, slipping the roll of bills and his silver watch into a little crevice between lath and plaster in the wall by his side. They fitted in snugly, and after scooping up a handful of dust, he powdered the hole until all traces of the hiding-place were gone. "There!" he exclaimed, noting the exact spot, "I guess they'll be safe for a while."

During the operation he had listened intently for any sounds of the pursuing party, but had not heard so much as a footfall. "They've gone, the cowards!" he thought, gaining a little courage from the oppressive silence. "Wharf-rats of the worst character — I should have seen that."

But though he was gradually breathing a bit more freely as the seconds passed, he could not bring himself to attempt the forcing of a window; nor could he begin operations by throwing the doors as he had planned mentally, for might not the men at that very moment be gaining the second floor by means of another stairway? No, he would not block the only known means of escape, until it seemed absolutely necessary. He stood stock-still, feeling a reaction of the first excitement.

"No, they have not gone off," he told himself; "they mean to have me."

His keen sense of hearing detected the striking of a match in the hallway below. He kneeled over the dim space with his ear below the level of the floor: the man was cautiously advancing, following his path in the thick coating of dust with the aid of the temporary lights.

"It's Creedon, surely. Kiddy wouldn't puff so," murmured Perry, in a low, monotonous tone, going to the adjoining room and catching up a broken iron pot. He returned to his post just as the burly skipper reached the foot of the steps and began the ascent. Raising the pot in both hands high above his head, Perry let fly with all his strength straight for the advancing white cap. His aim was true; and despite the intervening headgear, the blow sounded on Creedon's head like a hammer on a hickory nut. The river man sank beneath it, while Perry, after dropping the nearest door over the stairs, rushed about for the others, shoving the ends under the near studding braces in such a manner that, with the final weight of the old stove in the middle, the boy felt certain that the combined efforts of both men could not shift them sufficiently to gain an entrance under ten minutes. This done, he ran to the windows, and pried at them savagely with a stout wooden rod. But the boards had been well fitted, and it was impossible to force the bar in far enough to start them.

Though more agitated now than before, for he momentarily expected to hear from Kiddy, there was a great sense of satisfaction in the belief that Captain Val was out of the contest for the present; and though Kiddy was a full-grown man, Perry believed that if it came to a struggle between them, he would have a fighting chance. He kept reproaching himself for his stupidity, and recalled the fact that he had hugely enjoyed the sail over the river. "And with these rascals!" he cried vehemently. "I must have been blind!"

"Hey, you young jackanapes! Come down here and see what you've done!" came the audacious command from Kiddy, who, having grown anxious over the delay, had by this time ascertained the cause of his captain's fall and the subsequent general clamor and falling of boards. "He's hurt bad."

"It's a pity he's alive at all!" spoke Perry, passionately; for following Kiddy's words he could hear Captain Val begging for "a two-finger nip." "Besides," he added nonchalantly, for he felt things were coming his way, "it's too dark down there, Mr. Kiddy. Did you leave your rope outside?"

"Ho, ho!" laughed Kiddy, maliciously. "We'll tie you up yet, you cub!"

"Pass down the roll," demanded Creedon, huskily. "That'll do us."

"Come up and get it," was Perry's serene reply. "As soon as I get ready, I'll drop from a window and report you to the police."

He had no time to regret the speech. No sooner had he delivered the words than he heard the men running along the narrow passage. Thinking they would be certain to find another stairway, the lad also started through the rooms. Yes, they were clattering and swearing on the main stairs, and they meant to take him by storm. He glanced wildly about for a window to carry as he had done the one on the ground floor; but with the exception of one on the quarry side they all seemed hopelessly closed. For the fraction of a second he entertained the thought of returning and removing the doors and rubbish from the back stairway. Then he changed his mind, opening a door at his left not an instant too soon, and with feverish excitement mounted the ladder leading to the garret. Directly he heard Kiddy rushing after him, and turning, struck fiercely with the wooden bar, which he had instinctively retained; but the space he had to swing in was small, and the furious ex-ranchman plunged doggedly after.

"I've got ye!" he panted, as Perry, having gained the floor, stood at bay just under the sloping roof. "Give up that bunch o' bills and we'll let you go!"

"Not a dollar!" cried the schoolboy, stoutly.



"Pay us for totin' you over," suggested Captain Val, as he poked his swollen head in sight; "you ain't done what you agreed on."

But Perry was not to be taken by this simple bait.

"You don't get a copper!" he cried, waving the club threateningly. "You won't get up if this hits you, Creedon! Stand back!"

"He's a-bluffin' you!" growled Kiddy, rushing in boldly. Perry brought the stick down with a resounding whack, but the blow that was meant for the rascal's head struck his shoulder as he dodged, glancing badly. Then they closed, wheeling toward Creedon as they fell. It

was a brief, brisk struggle. Perry fought valiantly for a time, and did great credit to his famous ancestor ; but after Creedon had added his two-hundred-pound frame to the contest, the battle was soon over. Kiddy then unwound the rope from his waist, and bound the captive hand and foot, drawing the cords unnecessarily taut. The boy noticed that while Kiddy was comparatively cool and collected, Creedon was clearly unnerved.

"You made a bad move when you battened down your hatches," observed the latter, affectionately stroking the top of his cranium. "You jarred my timbers scandalous with that kettle-pot, sonny."

Perry did not reply. A partial victory had been turned as quickly into what he considered an ignominious defeat that he continued to deplore his failure to carry a window and drop the fifteen feet to the ground. He firmly resolved, however, that the men should not brow-beat him out of the association's funds, come what might.

They went through his pockets, taking out a linen handkerchief, a small knife, a number of old letters, a copy of the association by-laws, a key chain without any keys, a pocket-book containing an Elevated ticket, a bit of red sealing-wax, and a half-dozen stamps. As Kiddy neared the completion of his search he seemed to fly into a rage.

"You needn't tell me," he muttered, "that you gave the 'dago' your roll."

"I didn't say so," Perry answered, coolly and defiantly.

"Where is it, then?"

"Where it won't be found."

This threw the unscrupulous Westerner into a white heat. "Val," said he, in a choking whisper, "let's throw him off the roof."

"I guess we can find the 'mazuma,'" retorted Crendon, in a conciliatory tone. "Let's hide the kid and have a look below."

"Where'll we hide him?" demanded Kiddy, sourly, brandishing a hard, brown fist in Perry's face. "You can't find nothin', Val."

Crendon's great thick lips shook like a mould of jelly. "Up in the 'copolee,'" he answered, after a moment's hesitation.

"Where?"

"In the 'copolee' there," and he pointed to the rounded base of the cupola. "Take him to the top, and lash him to the boards."

"Yes, and gag him," added Kiddy. "We don't want no squealin', makin' folks nosey."

"They'll be nosey enough by to-night, without the squealing," remarked Perry, chafing in his confinement.

"Now look here," put in Captain Val as a last resort, "if you hand over the coin and don't go reportin' of us to the 'coppers,' we'll let you out o' this bloomin' hull."

"Sure; we don't want to act no ways only on the level," asserted Kiddy.

"And I won't bring no charge agin you for 'sault and battery," pursued Creedon.

Perry smiled in spite of himself.

"You have made yourselves liable to long imprisonment," he coolly replied. "I repeat for the last time that I'll not give you one copper; but if you release me and go back to the river, I'll agree not to report your cowardly and treacherous attack."

"Hear him, now," said Val, assuming a wounded air that was too comical. "He ain't reasonable."

"It don't work, sonny," spoke Kiddy. "Do we get the 'mazuma,' or not?"

"Not from me."

They then withdrew to a little distance and held a short consultation, but Perry could catch only a few meaningless words. They presently returned, and Kiddy placed a short wooden gag between the boy's jaws, fastening the cords at the back of his neck. Between them they carried him up the doubtful stairs, lashing him loosely to the rough flooring. Perry watched them descend, and shortly afterward

he made out from the clatter of feet that they were searching for his bank-notes. At last the sounds died away altogether, and he judged they had left the building without the money. He then turned his attention to other things.

An oblong rent in the river side of the cupola attracted his notice. After some effort he rolled over upon his side, and looking out with his eyes close to the crack, beheld a ravishing view of the broad, foam-crested Hudson. From his elevated position he could look over upon the innumerable glittering skylights of the West Side dwellings; the pale yellow drive, with the buildings he knew so well; the pavilion at the foot of the cliff below the buff-colored school; and yes, further up beyond the maples, his own home of red brick and terra cotta. And now for the first time the true meaning of his position flashed like wildfire through his brain.

He was kidnapped! Yes, that was the very word, the only word to describe it—kidnapped in sight of his father's house; hidden, bound, and gagged, where no person would be likely to chance for months. Why had he allowed himself to be chased aloft, after his first fortunate escape? Might not the miscreants, chancing to hear of his father's reputation as a man of wealth, resolve to hold him indefinitely in the hope of a rich reward? But in the event of their becom-

ing alarmed by police investigation in the meantime, might they not carry him out to sea or up the river? In that case not only would his own vacation be blasted, but the bright hopes of many friends would be dampened so woefully that the Mink Lake outing would in all probability be abandoned.

"I should have given them the money," sighed poor Perry, tugging hopelessly at the cords that bound him.

There was but one satisfaction in the countless soliloquies with which he reproached himself: the realization that he had not shown the white feather at any stage of the unequal struggle. In a little while he heard hammering below—the rascals were doubtless boarding up the windows as they had found them. The time-bronzed weather-cock creaked dismally just overhead, while a happy company of sparrows chirped blithely under the eaves. An hour later, on looking down to the shore far below, he made out the hull of the *Summer Sea* among the small craft by the jetty, and pretty soon after saw Creedon and Kiddy walk out to her, cast a nervous glance or two toward the cliff, then push off and stand over for the pavilion. The little vessel was soon a mere speck on the broad blue bosom of the river.

Perry amused himself for another hour in watching

the freight-laden schooners and sloops chasing each other down stream; first one, then another, would appear to lead, owing partly to the skill with which the different skippers availed themselves of the ebb-tide.

Though the breeze sang merrily through the cupola, it was nevertheless intensely hot directly under the sun-baked shingles. The boy's mouth gradually grew parched with the close-fitting gag, and he welcomed the crimson shine of the sun on the water that told him the day was all but spent. A trio of magnificent river boats, their decks crowded with passengers, plied swiftly past to the faint strains of Hungarian bands.

"Bound for the Thousand Islands, Rip Van Winkle land, and the Adirondacks," soliloquized Perry, very dolefully. "I wonder what will become of me!"

CHAPTER VIII

VAL AND KIDDY PLAN



WHILE Perry was undergoing his struggles with the boatmen, Grant and Eugene were busily engaged in purchasing a varied bill of supplies at one of the large wholesale groceries down town. They had agreed to meet Harry at a Broadway sporting goods house, and about three o'clock joined him there.

"I've engaged the shells!" cried the genial Deer Lodger, gleefully.

"They're simply beauties, boys: all paper, long and racy, in good condition, with sliding seats and spoon oars; very little difference between them; the four at fifty dollars each."

"Cheap enough," was Grant's approving comment. "Where are they?"

"At Daly's. I went round with father, and he paid for them on the spot. They're to be boxed and freighted to Mill Eddy to-morrow."

"You're a rustler, Harry," said Eugene. "But wait till you see this bill: that's a nice menu for a training table, isn't it?" and he held the long list before his club-mate's eyes.

"Ahem! 'One dozen small cans salmon, one dozen sweet pickles, two dozen canned lobster,' whew! Well, I can stand it if the rest do, and not half try," he replied, laughing good-naturedly. "But speaking of fish reminds me that I must get some tackle," he concluded, going over to a show-case.

Once in the hands of the glib young salesman, the boys proved willing victims, purchasing braided silk, snelled hooks, flies and leaders enough to strip the trout streams of Pennsylvania. They had their rods and guns, of course, but the matter of ammunition was quite a serious one. Grant soon suspected that Harry and Eugene had designs upon the redoubtable "King of the Ridge," for after engaging a modest number of loaded paper shells, they purchased a quantity of cartridges for their Winchesters and revolvers. About five o'clock the trio took a Broadway car home, reaching Riverside a long hour later.

"Has Master Perry returned, Kelly?" inquired Grant, as the boys reached the house and deposited their bundles on the low rail of the veranda.

Kelly was trimming the shrubbery with a huge shears. He rose to his feet and scratched his head thoughtfully.

"I don't think so, young gentlemen," he answered. "Should I see the butler?"

"Never mind. We'll wait here awhile," said Harry, throwing himself down in the shade. "I tell you, New York's a stuffy place in the summer."

"And to-morrow's the Fourth of July," added Eugene. "I hope the yacht will bring the boys before long."

"Let's see: I wrote about your camp over a week ago," said Grant. "If they acted upon my instructions at once, it should be ready by the time we arrive."

"What's the difference?" argued Harry. "We can rough it as long as we like, just as easy. All that bothers me is the delay in getting off."

"The *Grayling* can come down the sound at sixteen knots an hour," explained Grant. "But grandpa will want to show the fellows Newport, New London, and other places, so I don't expect them much before the fifth. Wonder what luck Perry has had."

"I hope he finds some flyers," said Eugene. "Is the sailing good at the lake, Grant?"

"At times too good. The lake's pretty high, on a plateau. When the wind's from the west, there's usually quite a sea running; at other times it's quite calm."

"Then they needn't be 'skip-jacks,'" remarked Harry. "But Perry'll understand what to get."

The afternoon waned, but no bright-faced Perry put in an appearance. It was a simple matter to account for his absence; for, as his sister Margaret said, he had probably been directed up the river, or over to Staten Island or Bay Ridge. Nevertheless, as the evening drew on apace, the boys noticed that Mrs. Langdon glanced frequently out at the street, while Margaret sent Kelly down to the yacht club to make inquiries. By ten o'clock the boys had given up expecting their young host; and when they retired soon after, Grant, who shared with Perry the latter's room, felt oddly ill at ease. It was some hours before he fell asleep.

Now early in the evening, Creedon and Kiddy, having secretly discussed many plans for forcing Perry to surrender the bank-notes, decided to drop in upon the Geggus boys and ascertain if any inquiries had been made concerning their captive.

"Money or no money, we've got to let him out to-night," said Val, who fully realized the great danger into which they had placed themselves. "We're runnin' pretty wild for a small roll."

"We ain't hurt him, have we?" cried Kiddy, summarily.

"He'll reckon so," answered Val, tartly. "He'll make the complaint he spoke of to the 'cops,' right enough. Then we'll have to lay low for the summer."

"Ho, now! he'll not whistle a note," retorted Kiddy, with emphasis. "It won't surprise me if we get the coin without no threats when we get back."

"Easy," cautioned Val, as they neared the float. "Don't let nobody aboard these small yachts hear you talkin' so."

"I ain't afeared," Kiddy avowed. "Let them hark to me if they've a mind to," he concluded recklessly.

"You ain't reasonable," responded Val. "Don't disremember where we missed our passenger, now."

A crowd of boys stood around the show-case as the men entered. Val nodded to the group, and then, lighting a pipe, seated himself comfortably on a great coil of rope in one corner of the shop. Kiddy called for a cigar, at which Toby scattered several on the counter. The former soon found one to his liking.

"You ought to set up the pie for my toutin' you a passenger this mornin'," suggested the little chap. "Was there much in it?"

"Nothin'," growled Kiddy, in well-assumed disgust. "The lad never come down with his fare," he added, which was quite true.

"Oh, come off," disagreed Toby, smartly. "Don't I know he wasn't that sort of fellow?"

"Well, he was," averred Val, from his gloomy corner. "We landed him up the river 'bout two o'clock, and he agreed to come back and pay us."

"Thought you went over to Sylvestre's."

"Well, we did. But I reckon he didn't make no dicker for the *Bertha*," replied Creedon, audaciously.

"But you stood straight in for Jem Goodwin's when you left Jersey," persisted Toby, incredulously.

"Who says we did?" demanded Kiddy, not relishing the drift of the conversation.

"I saw you," grinned Toby. "Come, I guess the pies are on you."

"You're mistaken, baby," retorted the ex-cowboy, with increasing acidity.

"Our Baby," laughed Captain Val, nervously; "the name's writ on that bloomin' backboard there."

The entire company of loungers joined in the laugh that followed at Toby's expense.

"If you'd waited long enough, he'd have come back and paid you," maintained the youngster, stoutly. "His dad's most a millionaire."

Captain Val literally rolled from his seat. "You're bluffin'," he said, very huskily. "He ain't no such thing."

"Ain't the Langdons most millionnaires?" and Toby appealed to the gathering.

"Sure thing; the old man's got money to burn," answered the lads, hoping to induce Toby to "set them up."

"And mind the time the trains wouldn't blow no whistles nor ring no bells 'cause his boy was down with pneumomy," added Tommy Geggus, coming to his brother's aid. "That was when number three killed pa's bull pup; but the company settled, 'cause Mr. Langdon give the orders."

This was a convincing argument. Creedon's bead-like eyes gleamed with an anticipated triumph. He turned inquiringly to Kiddy, who, after clearing his throat, addressed Toby. "You're namin' the wrong lad," he said. "This boy lives in Massachusetts; it's wrote on the letters he showed us."

"I guess you didn't see straight. Maybe he went to school there, but he lives three corners up, on the drive," persisted Toby. "I often sell papers to the old gentleman."

The kidnappers were discreet in saying nothing more, for presently the group of hangers-on filed out to the float to view a display of fireworks going up

from the deck of a near-by yacht. It was an attractive sight, and before long proved too strong a magnet for the brothers to resist. The cool-headed Kiddy improved this opportunity to slip in behind the counter, despite the reminder on the swinging door to keep out, and catching up a half-dozen pies and a bottle of sarsaparilla, which he passed to Val, led the way out through the front entrance, walking along the breakwater to the well-known bath-house then doing business under the name of Tom. Here, after a few words, Kiddy again took the soda, while Val returned, directing his cautious steps to the *Summer Sea*, from whose cockpit the river boys were enjoying the spectacle.

"Git!" cried Creedon, who could brook no delay now that his simple mind was struggling with the problem of keeping Perry safely hid in the old house or vicinity, while he and his comrade would await the offer of an enormous reward, which he did not doubt would be certain to follow the boy's disappearance. He pushed off without another word, and presently found Kiddy awaiting him at the rendezvous.

"I reckon the pies is on Toby, after all," snickered Creedon, as his companion placed the stolen articles under the seat. "Well, we don't hear nothin' yet."

"His folks'll not take no alarm till midnight or

mornin'," replied Kiddy. "I wish that you'd had more sense, Val; you went too fur into particulars."

"It don't make no difference," retorted Creedon, overlooking the disparaging remark. "If this don't pay us a thousand apiece, I'll miss my guess."

"A thousand apiece!" repeated Kiddy, scornfully. "You forget the governor's got money to burn. Why not give him a chance to kindle up? Five thousand apiece is little enough."

Captain Val expressed his pleased surprise in a significant whistle. "Wonder how the lad is comin' on," he said, glancing from the gleaming expanse of water to the dark brow of hill, only here and there studded with faint, irregular lights.

"He ain't comin' a great way," laughed Kiddy. "We'll want to give him a bite to-night, for before daybreak we'd best be gettin' back in the sloop."

"Sure; we've got to be seen round Jem's together, or they'll be suspicioning us."

"That's the idea!" and Kiddy slapped the big fellow approvingly. "Val, we'll be rich as cattle kings afore another week. The thing's so simple nobody can't see through it."

"Let's scare him out o' his money," suggested the skipper, growing bolder as they left the city behind. "I ain't got the price of a 'two-finger nip.'"

"You can't scare that boy," said Kiddy, with

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decision. He's got no end of sand, and he's as stubborn as an Arkansas mule."

Creedon thought awhile in silence.

"If I get five thousand, I don't want the boy's stuff," he replied airily.

"Well, here we are," said Kiddy, cautiously, as the fresh wind drove the little vessel in under the lee of the cliff. "Take it easy, now; you can't say who'll be along shore a night like this."

"Nor up in that bloomin' house," added Captain Val, nervously. "I may as well fetch a handspike to bluff the spooks."

CHAPTER IX

PERRY PROVES A HERO



SOME early pyrotechnical displays along Riverside had attracted little groups of Sylvestre's tenants to the cliffs. The women were generally bare-headed, though here and there one noticed a dainty mantilla of scarlet or pink. The short, thick-set men lay about the hill-top, glad of a little diversion after the day's toil.

You caught the low hum of voices or the occasional exclamations of delight as a particularly refulgent rocket spilled its radiance against the pale evening air.

"Like enough somebody's loafin' round the old hull," remarked Captain Val, as Kiddy, who was piloting the way, paused at the brink of the quarry gorge to reconnoitre a bit.

"Shouldn't wonder," answered the latter, guardedly.
"There's quite a gatherin' up near the wall there."

"What's that?"

"I said," replied Kiddy, shaking off Creedon's nervous grasp, "that there's a small crowd just ahead."

"Who'd 'a' thought it!" sighed Captain Val, setting down the pies and soda and mopping his moist brow with a huge bandanna.

"It don't matter about that," muttered Kiddy. "They're there, and we've got to go round to the window you busted," he concluded, starting off.

"Hist!" cried Creedon, motioning his companion to halt.

"What's the matter now?"

"I was thinkin' that some fresh lads might have took a notion to sneak seats in the 'copolee,'" responded Captain Val, significantly.

"Then the game's up," said Kiddy, unhesitatingly. "That's what we've got to find out," he continued, plucking at his belt as men will do at such times. "We've got to face it out without no dallyin'."

"I'm with you," avowed Creedon, blustering up. "Take this handspike to knock in the boards."

"Don't want it," said Kiddy, disdaining the proffered weapon. "We won't hammer no more'n we have to. Come on."

"Well, fetch ahead," replied the big skipper, in

the tone of one who doubts an undertaking. "Kiddy, me boy, keep your eyes peeled."

Captain Val's admonition fell on deaf ears. Kiddy was already skirting the group with praiseworthy coolness and tact, pausing often enough to allow Creedon, who seemed to have lost the use of his legs, to overtake him. When they reached the southwest corner of the building, and could observe no one about, Kiddy led the way more briskly to the third window, through which Captain Val had entered in the morning, and which the kidnappers had carefully boarded before leaving the ledge-top. To their astonishment, they saw that one of the three boards was missing, while another leaned obliquely across the dark space. In the faint light Kiddy's face turned a sickly white.

"The lad's had a windfall," he commented, desperately. "Val, we're gone 'coons."

"Ain't it scandalous!" muttered Creedon, glancing warily over his shoulder. "Was it the 'cops,' do you reckon?"

"Beats me. Let's go and look for ourselves."

"They'll be waitin' to nab us."

"What if they are? You've got your handspike, and I've got my gun."

"Cracky!" gasped the surprised river man, as Kiddy displayed a glittering six-shooter of great size. "I wouldn't have guessed you had it on you."

"Hurry," cried Kiddy, as he disappeared through the aperture, then turned to get the refreshment and give Val a hand.

"It's awful dark," argued the latter, complainingly. "The old house is haunted."

"Your grandmother's haunted!" growled Kiddy, fast growing weary of his vacillating comrade. "You'll have the 'dagos' snoopin' round, next you know."

When Creedon was at last assisted over the sill, Kiddy quietly replaced the boards as they had left them earlier in the day, he having found the third upon the floor.

"If you see anything uncommon, don't fling your handspike, nor go to yellin' like a redskin," were his instructions to Val, given in a guarded undertone. "We've got to have a look in the tower, first thing."

He removed his shoes and stuck them in the pockets of his jacket, Creedon following his example. They then moved cautiously forward, scarcely making a sound. Captain Val hung to Kiddy's heels, presently grasping the latter's arm in a vicelike grip, from which the ex-cowboy was unable to free himself.

"It's the spooks," hissed the skipper, all a-tremble with fear. "Hear 'em walkin'," and he motioned with the handspike to the floor above.

Kiddy hearkened.

"Patter-pat, patter-pat," were the sounds that came faintly to the listener's ear, dying away a moment after.

"It's the lad a-lookin' for a windy to drop from," explained Kiddy, in the hope of quieting Val's rising fears.

"What's that, then?" demanded Creedon, tightening his grasp.

"Kerthud, kerthud," now sounded distinctly from another quarter, which caused Captain Val to brandish his weapon wildly with his free hand.

By this time both men had become thoroughly alarmed; but while Creedon was momentarily in danger of losing his head altogether, Kiddy merely set his jaw determinately and rapped his captain's knuckles with the pistol-butt. "Hands off!" he said coolly. "There's some rascality about this. It ain't spooks nor hobgoblins, though I can't just figure it out. You seen where they come in, didn't you? Ghosts don't break in old houses; they *are* in."

"Is the youngster cut loose, do you s'pose?"

"Aw, no," replied Kiddy, confidently, as a bright idea struck him; "they're just a couple of boys larkin' round, I'll allow."

This view struck the agitated skipper most favorably. "If I thought that, I'd go aloft and prod 'em a few," he said.

"I'll prod 'em," repeated the younger man, angrily. "Stay here till I ride the line awhile."

Without further explanation he glided to the main stairway, while Creedon withdrew from the braided beams of moonlight that sifted through the old walls. Presently he heard Kiddy uttering the most dismal and uncanny sounds he had ever heard: long moans, followed by foolish titters and low wails of distress. Had Captain Val been unaware of their origin, he must certainly have jumped in his skin for terror. As it was, he stood silently by and grinned his approval as the clatter of rapid footfalls reached his expectant ear.

"The rats is quittin' the old hulk," he muttered, once more regaining his self-command. "My pal's a regular 'killeloo bird,'" he added, as the sounds drew perceptibly nearer. "Did you ever hear such cat-calls? Sounds like a Bowery dime muse—"

Creedon did not quite finish his soliloquy, for just then a fleeting gray figure bounded like a scared rabbit from the narrow hallway. It seemed to be all arms and legs, and cleared the main vestibule with uncommon swiftness. As it passed through the band of moonshine, Captain Val thought he had never before beheld so grotesque an apparition.

"If it comes prow on to me, I'll send my hand-

spike at—hello!" he cried, as a second clatter of feet was heard in the passage, "here's another!"

This time a distinguishable human form, black as the ace of spades, trotted quickly across the main hall. Creedon could stand it no longer; his pent-up anxiety and fright gave vent at last. On the instant he raised the handspike, and despite Kiddy's instructions, hurled it at the dark body with all his force. He was a little late. The iron struck the wall with a sharp ring, and fell with a hollow thud. Before the skipper could recover it the nimble fugitives had made a second rush, from the passage on the right to the window through which the men had entered. As Kiddy had merely placed the boards in the frame, they were soon pulled out; and as the figures leaped to the ground Creedon delivered a second volley in the shape of the handspike. This time it landed unpleasantly close to the black fellow's head, just as he was plunging from sight.

"Nebber touched me, boss," came the parting shot, in unmistakable negro dialect, at which Captain Val swore immoderately.

"They're gone," whispered Kiddy, from the head of the stairs. "The lad's all right. Bring up the pies, and we'll have a bite in the tower."

"What'll we do if anybody comes back?" inquired the skipper, cautiously.

"Nobody'll be along. My bluff has started all the 'dagos' from the cliff; I see 'em from the windy."

Perry was accordingly released a few moments later—that is, his arms were freed, but some loose coils of rope were left about his legs. After the gag was removed, and he had had a drink from the bottle, which was still cool, he appeared greatly refreshed, and sat up in the dim light with his back to a friendly joist, stretching his arms akimbo.

"We ain't brought you no 'blow-out,'" observed Creedon, spreading the little disks before the lad. "But here's a nice lot of pies; peach, custard, and berry, the best we could find."

Perry was all but famished. Since early morning he had gone without substantial food, and this under circumstances that would have made most boys cry out in despair. He had borne up bravely under his trying imprisonment, and for the most part had accepted his position philosophically. And now, though his instinct strongly rebelled against conversing with the rogues, he thought it best to avail himself of the present and ascertain all he could.

"You've had quite a frolic below, haven't you?" he began, greedily munching a disk.

"A couple of lads was makin' themselves free and easy with this hotel," laughed Creedon, guzzling the

soda, "and my pal here got them under way like they was phantom ships."

"I heard them," said Perry, honestly, "but couldn't make them hear me."

"Wind and tide are agin you, my boy," answered Captain Val, briskly. "We know all about ye."

"About me?" cried Perry, his heart sinking within him. "What do you mean?"

"Don't go actin' so foolish," remonstrated Kiddy, leisurely lighting his pipe and settling back with exasperating ease. "We've heard about the governor's boodle, and mean to have a slice," he concluded decidedly.

"Then it is your intention to kidnap me?"

"That word don't sound overly well, but I reckon it fills the bill," drawled the skipper; "it's been a great day for McCaffrey and Creedon, this has."

The force of these rude arguments could not be denied. Perry's gravest fears had been realized: the men had in some way ascertained all desired information, and now meant to hold him in captivity until a suitable reward should be forthcoming. He reflected that the chances of his being discovered in his present position for at least a couple of days were very slight—he had at first considered the possibility of months. He knew that before a week should pass the entire detective service of the city would be

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searching for him, and it would be very odd if by that time the rascals were not frightened off. He could hope for nothing from the weird occurrences of the evening, though it was just possible that the lads might return with others in search of fire-wood, — he had distinctly heard them breaking up lath and flooring, — and then he might have better luck in making them hear, or they might even venture to the cupola. But on mature reflection he told himself that he must await the advent of a searching party. He had nothing to fear at present; the men seemed disposed to treat him with fair consideration, and it was reasonable to suppose they would continue to do so. He hoped and trusted his father would not offer any reward for his recovery. Argue with himself as he would, however, this seemed the only practical solution of the problem.

“I’d rather lose the whole vacation than have it come to that,” he soliloquized firmly. “It would take all the fun out of the trip: thoughts of the ransom money and being buncoed so neatly would spoil the sport for any one; and the fellows would joke me unmercifully! Why, Walt Hillman was captured by a full-fledged outlaw, and Harry rescued him. That showed good nerve. I wish Don or George would happen up here to-night.”

He next endeavored to picture the boys enjoying

the sail down the sound in the capacious and beautiful *Grayling*. He fancied they were relishing the novelty hugely, and would be too stunned to utter a word when, on the yacht's arrival, they should learn of their chum's sudden and mysterious disappearance. "And here I am in plain sight of the clubhouse," he sighed wearily. "I suppose I shall see the *Grayling* swing to her moorings and hear the salutes; it wouldn't surprise me in the least."

He looked out through the little round window at the myriad of creamy stars and gleaming lights. It seemed that he had been caged for days instead of hours. He tried to imagine which of the hundred odd lights along Riverside shone from his own room; whether Grant and the fellows had turned in, or if they were already making inquiries at the pavilions.

"No use," he finally soliloquized, as he dropped his eyes to the rope and incidentally noticed Kiddy eying him narrowly. "If this doesn't come to a ransom, I'll miss my guess."

Kiddy had followed the boy's train of thought wonderfully well; he was very smooth, Kiddy was.

"Say, youngster, where's the governor's office?" he demanded.

Perry's blood rushed to his temples. "I won't tell you," he answered defiantly.

"Small difference; moment's work to-morrow," remarked Kiddy, tauntingly.

"Ain't you most ready to hand over the little roll?" inquired Creedon.

"My mind has not and will not change," replied Perry, positively, and turned his attention to the river.

They sat there without another word for two long hours, smoking continuously. Perry grew heartily sick of their wakefulness, and about ten lay down upon the hard floor, with his jacket rolled up for a pillow. But sleep was at first impossible. Now and then the report of a giant fire-cracker, heralding the glorious Fourth, would drift over from the far shore, or a shrill whistle would sound on the water just below. And when at last he fell off into a heavy sleep, he was tortured by dreams of the rascally ferrymen. Once he thought he heard Kiddy's voice repeating a command: "Give up that bunch o' bills and we'll let you go." He tried to answer that he would get them, but something seemed to choke the speech. He caught at his throat instinctively, and presently awoke with a start. There could be no mistaking the odor that filled the air, that pungent smell of thick, black smoke.

"We're afire!" gasped the terrified lad, sitting up and trying in vain to struggle to his feet.

"Creedon! Captain Val!" he shouted desperately.

"Cut me loose!"

He waited but an instant for a reply, for the smoke was rapidly condensing. Then, leaning over, he extended his arms in the hope of touching the men, straining his eyes to penetrate the fumes, and felt, rather than saw, that they had deserted him. He remembered with a shudder that Kiddy had appropriated his knife with the other belongings, so bent all his energies to loosening the knots with his fingers. The cords were at last started, and after twisting out of the network, leaped forth like a fox from a trap. He descended to the garret, feeling his way along in the dark, and finally came to the steps leading to the second floor. Smoke was pouring up the passage, which, with the help of the open window and cracks, seemed to be doing service as chimney. Plunging at once into the black cloud, he soon reached the room below, where the air was much better, and moved along toward the north wing. This end was comparatively free from smoke, and showed a far better light. After a hurried search he found the bank-notes and watch, which he slipped into his trousers pocket.

"The fire's in the south end," he told himself, breathlessly. "I've *got* to go down the main stairs and carry a window."

He started off at once, soon reaching the top of the flight. During the minute he had been gone the flames had gained remarkable headway, and were now hungrily licking the old wainscoting in the main hall.

Perry ran down halfway and vaulted the baluster. The flames were roaring merrily in the south end, and the wind was driving the fire forward. There was little or no smoke here, and by the bright light the boy had a clear view of the frail interior and doomed walls. Hurrying to the nearest window, he pulled out the boards that Kiddy had left in position on leaving the building some hours before, and was about to leap to the ground when a low, half-smothered cry of distress reached him. It seemed to come from the burning quarter, from a room on the right, and he turned his startled eyes to the sound. There lay Captain Val stretched out at full length upon the burning boards, one arm across his face moving slightly, and a great mass of stone and plaster, that had fallen with the mantel, pinning him to the floor!

Without pausing to consider the consequences, Perry rushed across the hall and through the blazing doorway. The floor was already crumbling beneath him, and the heat was terrific. He saw that Creedon had been struck on the head, doubtless by the fallen chimney stones, and had been unable to free himself

from the loose mass. The lad at once set to work rolling off the flat rocks and marble slab. With praiseworthy agility he got the stricken man clear of the wreck, and began hauling him toward the door.

"Stand up!" cried Perry, raising his voice above the crash of falling timbers. "The floor is sinking!"

"Can't," said Captain Val, miserably. "Fetch ahead."

Perry wound his fingers about the skipper's collar and hung tenaciously to his task, Creedon assisting him all he could with his arms and sound leg, for one had been broken in the fall. After a seeming eternity they reached the doorway and plunged into the flame, Captain Val moaning dismally, and the floor behind them crashing into the cellar. Perry clung true as steel to his burden, and continuing across the hall, reached the window in an exhausted condition. Creedon could just raise his arms to the low sill, where he hung like grim death. The lad moved the limp form by degrees until the shoulders were well through, then leaped to the ground and pulled the helpless skipper after him. He could not break the fall altogether, and Captain Val struck heavily, with a pitiful cry.

"Youngster," he said hoarsely, lifting two grateful black eyes to Perry's face, "you'll make your mark in this world without chalk." Then he fell back and

lay quite still, while some expectant sightseers ran in from the highway and assisted in dragging the heavy form to a safe distance under the apple trees.

"The old fellow's had a bad twist," said one, gingerly examining the captain's bruises. "Get some water, boys, for the death-haul's hard by."

"The man's leg is broken," explained Perry. "Send for an ambulance at once."

"I'll go," said a young fellow in a cycling suit, and immediately started off.

"Huh!" exclaimed an elderly man, bending over the outstretched form. "If it ain't Val Creedon, high and dry on a hill-top! Who'd 'a' thunk it!"

"It's Val, right enough," added another. "Been skylarkin', I take it?" he inquired, turning to Perry.

"In a way," answered the boy, discreetly. "I found him under a pile of stones in the right wing."

"You didn't happen along none too soon, sonny," said the first speaker. "That's the second time they've fired that old shed."

"Jest for the fun of seein' it tip off the ledge," was another's comment. "This'll be a bad night for Val," he continued, holding a can of water to the skipper's lips. "He never was remarkable robust."

After a refreshing drink Perry cast about him in the gloom for Kiddy. He felt he had discharged his full duty in regard to Captain Val, and had absolutely

nothing to fear from that quarter; but thoughts of his captivity were still fresh in his mind, and now that he had regained his liberty, seemed more repellent than ever. Kiddy, he knew, was not above foul play, and would not hesitate to strike him a cowardly blow the first opportunity he got. He therefore determined to approach the river with the utmost caution; accordingly, after he had made straightforward replies to the few simple questions put by a policeman and an ambulance surgeon, half an hour later, he slipped from the fast-gathering crowd and proceeded down the trail, pausing frequently to enjoy the splendid spectacle of the burning building. It was just before dawn, and the incessant booming of cannon-crackers in the metropolis sounded like the rumble and roar of a distant battle-field.

A number of large and small craft lay to in the flood-tide, apparently awaiting the building's collapse into the quarry gorge. Owing to the brisk wind, the flames rose thirty feet or more above the tottering roof, while a great, ruddy plume of fire soared proudly from the doomed cupola. Perry could not take his eyes from the reddening, writhing mass. Before another five minutes had passed, the east wall trembled and fell with a crash; for a few brief seconds there was a solid tongue of flame the whole length of the structure and nearly as high;

then the cupola leaned and fell sideways with a sharp report, followed closely by the remaining three sides caving with a thunderous roar, and a blinding wall of smoke rising from the gorge to the gallant salutes of the river craft.

To many on-lookers it had seemed a fitting incident heralding a particularly joyful Fourth, made so by some remarkable victories recently gained by Uncle Sam in the war with Spain. But the usually patriotic Perry did not see it in that way. Now that he had dismissed all fears of Kiddy, and had witnessed the destruction of Sylvestre's ramshackle, there was nothing to take his attention from his own burns, which began to pain him severely. He went down to the water's edge and thrust his blistered hands into the cool mud, utterly exhausted. The reaction was beginning to tell upon him, and more than once he had to swallow hard to keep the tears from welling his tired eyes.

As the opaqueness of dawn gradually lifted, he made out, among a dozen vessels, a familiar white hull lying some two hundred yards from the nearest wharf. He looked again, as if doubting his eyes, at the high prow, rakish masts, and stack. Then he bounded to his feet and ran along the dock between rows of sweet-smelling lumber, with a speed that a moment before had seemed impossible. Reaching

the end of the pier, he looked once more. Yes, it was the *Grayling*, and there were some of the fellows lounging about the starboard rail. Surely, this was a joyous surprise, too good to be true. He put his hand to his head for his cap, but it had perished in the burnt structure, along with his jacket. Making a trumpet of his hands, he halooed with all the power of his lungs, waved his arms wildly, and then whistled shrilly. At last Donald, to whom the peculiar whistle was familiar, espied him.

"Perry Langdon!" he exclaimed, pointing to the wharf. "Of all things, what's he doing there?"

"I don't think it's Perry," disagreed Deane, slowly; "too small."

"I know it is," added George, positively, for brothers seldom mistake each other.

"Captain, send a boat over," said the general, who had overheard George's remark. "And send the glasses aft, if you please."

A dory was lowered at once, and manned by a brawny seaman and the mate. A few moments later it reached the dock. The boys noted a short pause, as Perry exchanged a word with the officer, and then saw the figure climb down the stationary ladder into the boat, and the man bend to his oars on the return.

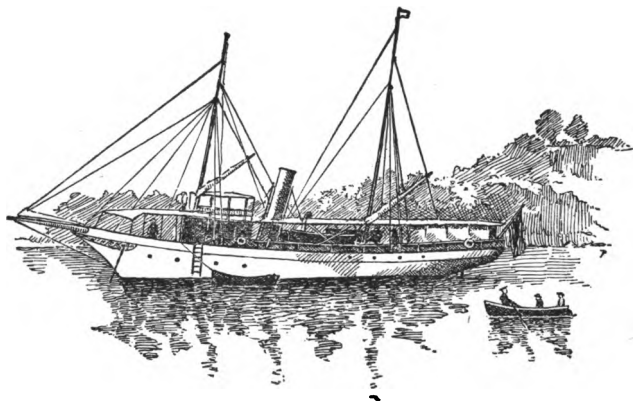
Shortly after, a very sorry-looking lad climbed up the yacht's side. George was the first to perceive

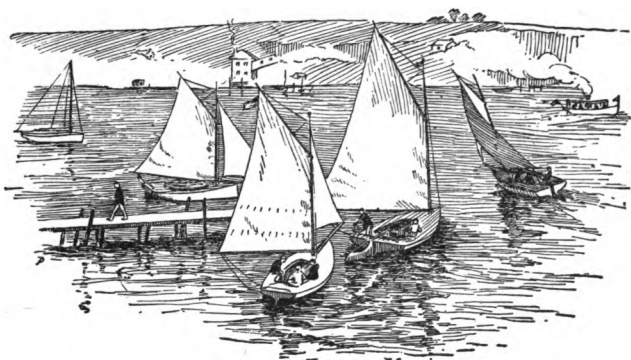
and comprehend the soiled clothes, charred shoes, singed hair, and haggard look. He bounded forward and threw his arms about his brother's neck, while the others, after a moment of stupefaction, drew in a circle about them.

"Oh, Perry!" he cried passionately, "you've been in trouble."

"Nothing much," said Perry, brokenly, "only a —"

"Come this way, my boy," interrupted the general, kindly, as he led Perry aft. "Captain, you may cross the river at once."





CHAPTER X

HO FOR MINK LAKE

GENERAL BURTON accompanied Perry to the former's luxurious stateroom, just aft the mainmast, George following at their heels. The other boys discreetly withdrew to the port rail, where they quietly speculated on their friend's unfortunate experience in the burnt structure; for they soon realized that the lost ramshackle had been the cause of some mysterious trouble, though of what nature they could not say. Some of their solutions were quite laughable, while others were very grave; but all their conclusions flew wide of the mark, as might have been expected, though they helped to pass the moments while crossing the river.

It took but a short time for the *Grayling* to glide to the club-house. She fired a salute from her star-board bow, which was answered by the little brass cannon on the yacht club's breakwater. The national ensign and the club flag were already flying gayly from the flagstaff and gaff, though the three white lights, forming the private night signal, had not been lowered.

"That isn't the usual custom," explained Arthur. "The flags go up at eight, and come down with the sunset gun, when the triple lights are raised; but from the looks of things about that pier, it's going to be a lively day on the river, and I suppose the janitor is celebrating accordingly."

Certainly the morning had dawned auspiciously. Already there were little cruising parties getting under way. Sloops, launches, and cat-boats were alive with frolicking men and boys, and you caught the brisk, good-natured orders delivered by the holiday captains, and executed by willing crews in more or less original style. The creaking of blocks and rattle of tackle were good to hear, and when presently the halliards were drawn home and cleated, a merry little fleet stood down the river to the lively chorus that begins, "Sailing, sailing, over the bounding main," and terminates by predicting a stormy passage for poor Jack. The flotilla passed close to

the superb yacht, and one fat little captain dipped his flag to her. Then Captain Jamison of the *Grayling* saluted in return, while our friends waved their caps.

"Now if we could only get off to-night, and be up to the lake to-morrow, I should count ourselves lucky chaps," said Donald, seriously. "I wonder if poor Perry will feel like moving for a week," and he glanced across the river to the smouldering hill-top and then expectantly toward the stern.

"Here's George," said Walter. "Ask him how it goes aft."

But George was quick to note his friends' varied expressions of interest and concern, and told all he knew voluntarily.

"Perry was caught in that fire," he said, a lump still in his throat, "but managed to get out just in time. Why he was there he didn't say, and the general didn't press him. It's a mystery to me, for he says he left the fellows yesterday after breakfast, and crossed the river in the hope of finding a twenty-footer. It's a lucky thing we crossed to see that blaze."

"So it is. Wouldn't he like a change of togs?" asked Donald. "He often wears my things."

"We've fitted him out, Donnie," replied George, smiling, though he spoke gravely. "Why don't you go back and see him, fellows?"

"We'll wait a bit," said Deane, as the steward passed by with a steaming dish of something that smelt very good.

"It'll be a surprise at the house," continued George, who was a bit of a wag. "Mother will think he's fallen foul of a cannon-cracker."

"He won't need a hair-cut in a hurry, that's a fact," added little Paul.

"Well, I prefer to have my rippling locks severed by the garrulous knight of the shears," said Donald, lightly. "And that's bad enough, when the hair gets down your back."

This sage remark, emanating as it did from the cultured brain of Boston's fairest son, had the desired effect of restoring good-fellowship and lifting the veil of depression that had hung low since Perry's unexpected advent.

"Papers, all the morning papers! *Herald, Sun, or World!*"

"Ho! see the little chap in the skiff," said Jack, as Billy hallooed to the newsboy.

"He's got a big bundle of papers," added Walter; "enough to swamp that little shell."

"I've got change," said Arthur, as the first officer came up with money from the crew. "Little fellow, give me four *Tribunes*, three *Heralds*, and three *Suns*."

"Yessir!" and Toby Geggus — for it was, indeed, Toby in all his glory on a holiday morning — quickly counted out the sheets and handed them to the man on the ladder.

"How much?"

"Half a dollar," responded Toby with alacrity, and Arthur tossed the coin to him. He was about to row off when the general hailed him from abaft.

"My boy, do you know where Dr. Avery's office is?"

"Yessir!"

"Go up and tell him to come down to the clubhouse as soon as possible. He is wanted aboard here. No, nothing at all serious," he continued reassuringly, in lower tones, as the boys crowded about him, "a few slight burns — all right to-morrow. George, you had better go ashore and let your parents know the facts, for they will be worrying. Mr. Blakeslee, a boat."

George and Donald were soon hurrying across the iron bridge that spans the railroad, while Toby, having landed at the pavilion and delivered his stock to his brother, went at once for the physician.

The boys found Mrs. Langdon seated on the veranda, the centre of an anxious group, including Margaret, her father, and their young guests.

Donald raised his cap as they approached, but

George rushed to his mother at once, and taking her gently in his arms, said softly, —

“Perry is aboard the *Grayling*, mother dear.”

“I am so glad,” cried Mrs. Langdon, as if a great weight had been lifted from her heart. “I feared my boy had met with some mishap.”

“You bring good news, youngsters,” said Mr. Langdon, heartily, as greetings were exchanged all around. “When did you arrive?”

“A short time ago. We expected to breakfast with you, but the boys were so attracted by that bonfire that I believe the plan has been given up,” answered George.

“Oh, it is so early yet! Do have them up,” urged Margaret. “We, too, saw the building fall, and thought it a great treat.”

“At least send the general ashore,” added Mrs. Langdon. “And Perry, too, for he deserves a good scolding for running to meet you without letting us know.”

“He didn’t do just that,” said Donald, ever ready to defend his chum. “The fact is, we picked him up on the Jersey shore, over by the fire.”

“Worse yet,” returned Margaret, promptly; “serenely enjoying himself, while we were worrying our heads off!”

“I don’t think he enjoyed himself much,” com-

mented George, dryly, recalling his brother's condition as he stepped up the *Grayling's* ladder.

"Well, we'll go down and see the fellows," proposed Grant, feeling certain that "something was in the wind."

Eugene and Harry next excused themselves and followed Grant, while George, finding a good opportunity, drew his father aside and told him all he knew of Perry's adventure. The senior Langdon very sensibly concluded to say nothing of the matter at present, and without exciting any suspicion managed to reach the yacht soon after the others. There he found Perry entertaining the boys with a glowing description of the fire, but the modest lad failed altogether to account for his presence in the old building, nor did he mention his heroism in dragging Captain Val from the flames.

Dr. Avery had prepared himself in advance for assuaging the burns young America invariably receives on this great day, and arriving soon after, speedily dressed Perry's hurts, which were quite painful, though no one could have discovered it. "It isn't an ordinary Fourth of July singeing," he said on leaving; "looks as if you'd been through a powder factory, my boy."

"Through the roof?" and Perry laughed heartily as they saw the physician to the boat.

When the lads were again alone, they had a long talk regarding the cat-boats. During the discussion, Perry incidentally produced the bank-notes with a very natural feeling of pride, and as he counted out the bills he told himself that he had indeed been favored by fortune in his encounters with the villainous boatmen. Had he been alone with George and Don, or even with the members of his club, he would probably have given the whole story from beginning to end. But in the presence of the Deer Lodgers, two of whom he knew had encountered far greater dangers on more than one occasion, he would say nothing. He foolishly believed that to mention the rescue of Captain Val would savor of the vainglorious, and this seemed an unpardonable crime to the courageous lad, whose innate modesty forbade anything of the kind.

"Captain Val can be found at any time," he thought, "and is doubtless suffering tortures with his leg. If I let out the story, I shall probably have to remain in the city and appear against Kiddy." Kiddy! The very thought of the smooth ex-ranchman caused Perry to smile grimly. "He's dug out," he soliloquized, "and will keep out. No, I shall say nothing more. It was my fault in the first place for showing the money, and theirs in the second for trying to rob and kidnap me. But then I might have

fared far worse. They might have hung me up by my thumbs, or they might have left me securely lashed in the cupola." The boy shivered, and turned his eyes from the far shore. But now he began to understand why the skipper had become pinned to the blazing floor. The men that Kiddy had routed from the building earlier in the evening, and whom he—Perry—had heard breaking up fire-wood, had meant from the outset to fire the old house in honor of Manila and the Fourth. They were frightened off by Kiddy's unearthly calls, but had hidden in the vicinity, and when they observed the Westerner leave the ramshackle, as he must have left sometime after midnight, they immediately returned and started the blaze in the south end, not knowing of course that Perry and his captor were in the cupola. It was easy to see the rest: Captain Val had been aroused, presumably by the smell of smoke, and frightened out of his wits by the position in which he now found himself, had quickly and quietly descended to battle the fire with furious energy; the chimney and mantel had fallen upon him, and the wind, sweeping the fire to the main hallway, had sent to the cupola the plumes of smoke that had awakened the sleeping lad. Oddly enough, the good-hearted fellow felt that the misguided commander of the *Summer Sea* had received sufficient punishment for his mis-

deeds, but toward Kiddy he continued to feel very bitter.

"A penny for your thoughts, Perry," said Deane, who had dropped out of the discussion with the adventurer. "You know you've got a good story, if you've a mind to tell it."

"Not worth hearing, old man," replied Perry, idly; but about eight o'clock that evening he was forced to retract his words, and it all happened in this way: When crippled, singed, and bedraggled Val Creedon was lifted on a stretcher from the ambulance in the courtyard of the Hoboken Hospital, where he had been driven from the fire, he firmly believed for the first time in his shadowy career that "the way of the transgressor is hard." It had been many years since Val's good mother had repeated those words to him, and several times during the fruitless years spent along the river he had recalled them vividly. But now, as he was carried up a broad stairway into an ill-smelling room lined with poor unfortunates, the full import of the motto fell upon him. Val's leg pained him far more than his burns, and when he presently heard the surgeon pronounce it a compound fracture, he began to call loudly for a priest. The table of shining instruments and bowl of plaster further exhausted the small supply of courage left over from the night, but for all that the big fellow stoutly refused to swallow an opiate.

"You don't take off my leg, old saw-bones, not if I know myself," he said darkly. "Go ahead and splice her while I stand by."

"It will be very painful," argued the assistant. "Besides, if you're not quiet, you'll disturb the other patients. We're not contemplating an amputation."

Captain Val glared defiantly at the speaker's blue hospital coat and brass buttons.

"I reckon I'll stand it," he growled, and settled himself like a hero.

The lights were arranged satisfactorily, and a screen was placed at the foot of the cot. Then the surgeon fell to work, and during the long and painful operation Captain Val maintained a resolute silence. But finding that the pain seemed to increase with the surgeon's departure, he gradually fell into a hopeless state of despair. A deplorable accident in the freight yards that night had filled the little building to overflowing, and at a patient's request a priest had been summoned. This excellent man, in passing from the floor above, chanced to observe the miserable skipper. Creedon spoke to him at once.

"Father," he moaned, "give me a word." And before the astonished Romanist could stop him, Captain Val had poured out a somewhat disconnected story of his misdoings, dwelling especially on Perry's heroism in dragging him to safety. In reply, the

priest, evidently believing the man to be laboring under a delusion, spoke in low and comforting tones, and by his gentle words of wisdom succeeded in quieting the skipper.

Now while Captain Val was making his confession, a glib reporter in the employ of one of New York's great dailies sat just behind the screen, taking notes on the railroad disaster. At first he was inclined to doubt the story, but on hearing of the attempted kidnapping and Perry's courage, decided to look into it at once. Finishing his report of the smash-up, he descended to the main office, where a crowd of reporters were still at work. Learning from the clerk where Creedon was taken in, he went directly to the scene of the fire, about the middle of the forenoon crossed to Jem Goodwin's, and finally, after persistent questioning, brought up at the Geggus pavilion, where he learned enough to complete an astonishing and fairly truthful tale.

All this while the *Grayling* was off on a short cruise up the Hudson. Being a holiday, the boys decided not to attempt the purchase of the cat-boats, but spent a pleasant day viewing the beautiful Palisades and talking over a hundred and one subjects bearing on the proposed outing.

It had been a great day for little Toby Geggus. He had had a continual round of luck since Arthur

tossed the half-dollar to him early in the morning: he had sold out his papers at the remunerative price of five cents each, had received his second fifty-cent piece for calling Dr. Avery, and just for answering a few silly questions had received a two-dollar bill from one of those "reporter fellers." That was at noon. About three o'clock he went out amid the throng of frolicking, screaming bathers on the float, had a refreshing plunge or two, then dressing, climbed the hill to await the coming of the evening papers. At last the chunky bay horse appeared at the hill-top, and Toby ran out for his stock, money in hand.

"Thirty *Telegrams*, ten *Mails*, twenty *Suns*," he said, handing up thirty-five cents.

"Better take more *Mails*, Toby," suggested the driver, as the man at his side counted out the papers. "Smash-up in Jersey, and kidnapping right at home here," and he pointed to the following lines in large capitals on the first page of the *Mail and Express*:—

PERRY LANGDON A HERO!

HE CLEVERLY OUTWITS TWO WOULD-BE KIDNAPPERS AND
RESCUES ONE FROM A FOURTH-OF-JULY BLAZE
—THE CONFESSION OF A BOATMAN.

Toby read the lines with increasing interest and wonder. "If the other papers ain't got this, give me

all *Mails*, make it fifty *Mails*," he said excitedly, producing the extra fifteen cents. "I always thought Val Creedon wasn't on the level. He 'hooked' some pies from us last night, plague him!"

"You'll get their price out of those," laughed the driver, and indeed Toby had no trouble in making sales. Before he reached the Langdon house he began to wish he had bought seventy-five, for his cry of "Full account of the collision!" or "Full account of the kidnapping!" made the papers go like hot cakes.

Arriving at Eighty-ninth Street, he looked about, as was his habit, for Mr. Langdon, the butler, or Kelly. But Mr. Langdon was aboard the *Grayling*, Kelly was enjoying an outing at Coney Island, and the butler could not be seen. But what was better still, Toby espied Miss Margaret seated by the terrace wall reading. Slipping unobserved through the gate, he walked briskly up the lawn, shouting "Get the evening *Mail*! full account of Perry Langdon, the hero!"

Miss Margaret closed her book and stared at the little newsboy, then dropped her eyes to the large black letters. Hastily scanning the sheet that Toby presented, she soon realized the truth, and with a cry of mingled joy and alarm ran to the house.

"But he is, of course, all right, mother," she



"GET THE EVENING 'MAIL'!" SHOUTED TOBY. Page 122.

flung out gladly, when she had shown the heading, "for George said so. And to think it was our Perry!"

Mrs. Langdon sank back in her chair and read the long account, first quickly, then very carefully. The enterprising reporter had given a clever description of the rescue from what he had overheard in the hospital, and as Mrs. Langdon finished it her eyes dimmed with tears, and she went over to the window, where she stood gazing at the distant hill-top and down at the shining river.

When the *Grayling* dropped anchor, soon after sunset, it was decided that all hands should go ashore, pay their respects to Mrs. Langdon, and spend the evening viewing the fire-works from the yacht club's veranda. By this time the boys had ceased speculation on Perry's adventure, at which that young man was much relieved. But on arriving at the float, all hands were dumfounded on hearing Perry's name cheered enthusiastically from the balcony, where a number of men stood looking down upon them.

"It's all in black and white, boys," shouted jolly Joe Edwards, waving a crumpled sheet. "Come up, Perry, and hear what they say about you." But Perry instantly bolted, and leaping from the break-water to the beach, for the tide was out, climbed the wall to the railroad and went straight home. Just

what took place on his arrival was never made known, though Perry confided to Don on one occasion that for such a reception a fellow could well afford to "play hero once a week."

The sensational papers appeared next morning with half-page pictures of the rescue, "drawn from a special description given by Perry Langdon to the *Whirligig* artist," and portraits of the young hero, Creedon, and McCaffrey, evidently drawn from imagination. As Perry had persistently refused to see anybody in regard to the affair, this was very amusing. But so many conflicting accounts were printed, and his friends were so persisitive in their demands for the facts, that Perry finally relented and modestly gave the events from the moment he left Riverside.

"I call that pluck, boys, — pure pluck!" commented General Burton, gravely, as the lad finished. "I have no doubt now that you will cope successfully with this terrible 'King of Red Ridge' I hear you talking of, for you all appear to be of one stamp. I don't know much about hunting — haven't shot a gun since I left the army. But here is a little cup I want to offer to the winner of the single-scutt race," and as he spoke he produced a gold vase, very plain and chaste, perhaps nine inches tall.

A murmur of approval went round the group as

the cup was passed about, and it is safe to say a dozen vows were made then and there.

"I want you to train seriously," continued the general, "for Mr. Langdon and I are coming up to the race. We have been talking the matter over, and have decided that you had better leave these river pirates and the purchase of the cat-boats to us. If you fly around to-day and get things together, you might leave to-morrow morning."

"Hurrah!" screamed Grant, as he bounded on deck. "Grandpop, you're a trump!"

"That's the first time that rascal has been himself since we arrived," said the old gentleman, tossing his snowy head. "He prefers life in the woods to anything else on earth."

"You can't blame him," returned Mr. Langdon, as the boys left to collect toggery and pack trunks. "Their scheme is a clever one, deserving success."

The following morning our friends crossed the ferry at Twenty-third Street and took the train for Port Jervis. Their paraphernalia, which of course included guns, fishing rods, English and Irish setters, travelling bags, etc., attracted not a little attention on the way, and caused many observers to remark that autumn must certainly have approached unawares. The trip was made on time, and as the mountain local neared Mill Eddy, Grant could not resist poking his

head out of the window for a fleeting glimpse of the little station. To his delight he recognized a tall brown figure on the platform.

"Jerry Quick's waiting, fellows," he informed the boys, proudly. "Come, get your traps."

A moment later the dozen lads filed down the steps, some in white duck and some in golf suits, but all spruce and pretty, "like they was took out of a band-box," as Jerry said afterward.

"Glad to see ye, young uns," he said heartily, as Grant, having shaken hands cordially, introduced his comrades in turn.

Tim Anderson was on hand with a team, and the trappings were tossed into the wagon, which moved off at once. Before leaving the station, Hammie Tuttle, looking bigger and stronger than ever, appeared with John Thedford, and of course more genial greetings and handshaking followed.

"But how are things up at the lake, Jerry?" inquired Grant, who felt that matters rested for the present largely upon his shoulders.

"Pretty spry," replied Jerry, laconically. "We made a regular dandy camp-house where you directed, and Tim's lugged all the freight up, I reckon."

"Is the fishing good?" asked Jack, anxiously.

"Good!" repeated the jolly hunter, as he lighted

his faithful corn-cob, "the pike is growin' that fast the perch gets crowded out on to the beach. I fill a twelve-quart pail most ev'ry mornin'."

"That will do, Jerry," laughed Grant, as the merry party crossed the tracks and followed Tim's team up the mountain.





THE DEER LODGE CAMP

CHAPTER XI

COLORS GO UP

THOUGH Grant had often described the Mink Lake country to his friends, he had never quite done it full justice; this at least was the opinion of many of the boys as they crossed the summit of Button Rock Mountain and rested their eyes for the first time on Squirrel Island and the blue expanse of water beyond. No wonder, they thought, that Jimmy Lander had selected this, of all spots, for his mountain shooting-box; and no wonder that he had chosen Squirrel Island, now delightfully picturesque with its silvery hickories and midsummer dress of green, as the site for his camp.

As Tim Anderson and Jerry were plodding along with the team some distance in the rear, the boys decided to halt, and accordingly seated themselves

on friendly boulders, while Grant explained a few points of interest.

"Now up at that end," he began, pointing to the westward, "Red Brook joins the lake; it's the main inlet, and affords fair trout-fishing. Toward the south there is the outlet, Mink Brook, and Jerry says the fishing there is great. The lake is a mile wide and probably three times as long."

"It's a pretty fine-looking sheet of water," observed Harry. "Where's the best swimming?"

"Most any place. There's a nice shelving beach over where your camp stands; you can see it through the evergreen tops of the island trees."

"Yes; and there's the camp!" exclaimed the sharp-eyed Eugene. "What's that this way, fellows?"

"The boat-house, stupid," replied Paul, with a cousinly prod. "Grant, things look very natty."

"I don't know," said Grant, modestly. "I told Tim to build the house there because a fine little spring bubbles up among the alders, and it's in plain sight from the island."

"Where's our camp?" asked Billy.

"At the south end of the island. Jerry says most of the supplies were put off at our jetty, so we'd better all lunch together. There'll be time enough to straighten things out this afternoon."

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"Anything you say," responded Harry, with enthusiasm. "Let's be moving down."

"Don't you and Walt go sneaking off after that catamount," continued Arthur, good-humoredly. "You've simply got to do your share of the work as captain-general with Grant, Harry."

"Oh, what's the diff'!" retorted Grant. "We'll have a lot of help without them. But honestly, fellows, I don't believe that panther's in this country any longer," he continued sceptically; "it stands to reason that Jerry would have shot it long ago."

"Wal, now, if you ain't got it all drawed out so pretty like," drawled Jerry, who had overheard the disparaging reference to the "King of the Ridge." "Youngster, I guess you forgot how the old fellow faced you over in Bear Swamp last Octoby. I heard ye a-tellin' Chesterfield it kind o' unsottled ye at the time."

"I guess it did," replied Grant, with some spirit. "The next time I meet that old rascal, I'm going to be armed to the teeth, Jerry, and don't you forget it."

"The old lad were through here this mornin', bright and early," remarked Jerry, nonchalantly. "He dropped a three-prong buck down the swale apiece."

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed Deane, for Jerry spoke quite seriously. "How could he kill it?"

"The king has a leetle way of his own," reverberated the hunter, drawing idly on the corn-cob. "You can have the antlers by goin' down to that red oak—a tidy pair they be, too."

"Ho, ho!" laughed Billy, who thought he knew something of mountain lions. "Jerry, I should think the deer would do so well in this country that they'd crowd that panther off into the lake."

Jerry's jaw dropped, and he looked sheepish enough as the others laughed heartily at Billy's little witticism. He gathered his wits behind a cloud of smoke, however, after which he had to look Billy over very soberly; this done, he leisurely drew a well-worn jack-knife from his trousers pocket, and handing it to George, who chanced to be nearest, said smoothly:—

"I'll stake my knife ag'in yours that the buck lies yonder," indicating the swale by a toss of his thumb over the broad shoulder.

Billy winced, and his smile left him.

"You can't back out now," urged Walter, bound to stand by the West, win or lose.

"I'll do it," agreed Billy, impulsively, as he brought to light a splendid jack-knife containing two large blades of different shapes. "George, take this, too."

"Kiss it good-by," suggested Grant, at which there

was a general titter as the interested lads followed the redoubtable trapper over the ledges.

"Now," began Jerry, as he hummed and hawed good-naturedly, "yonder's where the deer pass down to water. Look for yourselves."

"Yes," admitted Billy, who by this time had a feeling that he had seen the last of his trinket, "that's a deer trail."

"I reckon you'll agree that the painter kind o' dropped from that limb," and Jerry nodded toward a horizontal pine branch that overhung the path and was nearly concealed by a dense growth of needles.

"How do you make that out?" inquired Perry, who seemed to be looking for signs in the tree.

"By the way the buck planted hisself, and then tried to jump. See how the hard ground is cut into," and the trapper pointed out the truth of his words.

Billy's expression of incredulity gradually left his jovial countenance, and he began whistling a lively and popular air by way of diversion.

"Why couldn't he jump?" inquired Paul.

"Can't nobody see?"

"I know," said Harry, recalling a certain thrilling encounter in the Osage Indian reservation a year previous. "After he got a good hold on the buck's neck with three claws and teeth, he clung with his free paw to every tree the buck passed, barking many

as you see there," and he pointed to fresh, irregular streaks on the young maples and chestnuts. On the former trees the gashes were even and clean cut, as though made with a sharp knife, and showed the ivory-white trunk beneath, while the rough bark of the chestnuts and oaks in several instances had been torn off as if with some great file.

"Kerrect!" cried Jerry, sententiously. "Take notice that claw, spread out, is nigh seven inches across; measure the marks yourself. Here's where the buck began to bleed, both sides, and here's where the king downed him," he continued, walking toward the red oak. "They fit here right spry, but it were all day with the under feller. My dog Crusty heard him bellowin' clear down at my cabin, jest afore daybreak. Thar's the carcass, jest as I first see it on my way to the eddy."

He pointed to the fallen deer, which had been all but devoured in a single meal by the rapacious panther. The antlers and head were there, sure enough, and these the boys decided to take and mount as a souvenir of the conflict.

"Well, Jerry, you're the winner," said George, handing the trapper both knives.

"And a very tol'able blade it is," replied the trapper, testing the steel on a bit of iron-wood. "My old lad'll do to clean fish; it was gettin' scandalous

wore." He pocketed the articles quite casually to poor Billy's sigh.

"You shouldn't bet," admonished Paul, earnestly. "I've heard some well-known men say it was one of the greatest evils of the day."

"Hear the little deacon!" laughed Eugene.

"It was only a bit of fun," added Don.

"Paul's right," said Deane, decidedly; "no more wagers."

"I don't need another knife, if that's what you're a-drivin' at," commented Jerry, whose mind didn't quite grasp the meaning of Paul's words.

"Now look here, Jerry," said Grant, cleverly turning the conversation, "before we go back to the

wagon, please tell me why you can't put a good hound after that panther and tree it."

"I have run him sev'ral times," drawled the trapper, "but he always gets off, somehow. Over on lower Red Ridge he takes to the swamp through some hemlocks, scoots round till he strikes some



rough ledges, dives into the mountain, an' tips his tile good day; but he's always liable to climb right down on to your back and begin to claw you," and Jerry, by way of illustration, raked the bark of a sapling with his finger nails.

"Why don't you trap him, or watch this carcass for some nights to come?" asked Billy, still considerably crestfallen over the loss of his knife.

"That ain't no use," replied Jerry, convincingly. "He never'll come back for a meal; fresh meat ev'ry eatin' suits the king tip-top, an' he kills his own game, thank ye," he concluded dryly.

"I see," answered Grant, thoughtfully, while the boys exchanged knowing glances. "But when winter comes, can't you track him then?"

"I b'lieve he 'berniates' through the snows," vowed Jerry, solemnly.

"He *what*?" gasped Grant.

"He 'berniates,'" stoutly averred the hunter. "That's what Chesterfield allowed."

"Jerry means hibernates," said Arthur, and this time the laugh was on the Blue Ridge man.

"Come," continued Grant, "Tim will be down at the lake waiting. If you're all as anxious for a bite to eat as I am, you'll step lively."

Perhaps Jerry was just a bit nettled.

"These bandbox boys won't eat too ravenous after

my tippin' 'em that bluff about the painter," he confided to Grant, as the party hurried after the team. "They're a likely lot, though, there's no denyin' it."

"Yes, and you didn't scare them one bit," declared Grant. "That chap in the white suit had a fight with a wild cat that would make your hair stand on end; it climbed right down upon *him*, with a vengeance; and he and his friends killed a grizzly," added the boy, proudly. "I tell you what's what, Jerry, you'll see plenty of fun around here before the summer's over."

By this time the party had reached the beach — about three o'clock. The satchels and other paraphernalia were piled on the raft at once and ferried to the island. Jerry had launched Jimmy Lander's canoe, the *Undine*, which, with his own, made it possible for the dozen lads to land in two trips. Grant was of course delighted to see the old shooting-box once more, though little time was wasted in sentiment. Boxes were immediately knocked in, cans opened, and a hasty meal prepared, after which Tim, Jerry, and the boys, one and all, fell to work with a will.

An equal division of the supplies and bedding was made, and then the Deer Lodge boys were ferried to their picturesque camp on the marge of the lake. Tim had carried out Grant's instructions to the letter :

the little veranda with its rustic rail, the boat-house and flagstaff, all added to the general suggestion of a right good time. The impetuous quarryman evidently desired to atone for his hasty move the previous autumn, when he turned his hounds loose on the runaway's trail, for he had gone so far as to wall up the spring in the alders, and in other ways showed his interest and good will in the schoolboys' plans. To be sure, Tim was getting pay for his labor, but all the same, Grant felt that he might have left undone many things that obviously had taken his time and attention from other work.

Harry now opened his hand-bag, and taking out a dainty club pennant of brown and blue, walked along the pebbly beach past the boat-house to the flagstaff, where he bent and ran up the colors while the boys cheered. He then beckoned to his club-mates, and together they gave Jimmy Lander, Grant, Tim, Jerry, and the Squirrel Island Club three ringing cheers. At the same time Deane raised the islanders' ensign on Crown Point, to enthusiastic hurrahs from George, Don, and Billy, who had remained on the island with him. Grant gazed proudly across the channel at the scarlet and white.

"That's a good start," he said, flushing slightly, "and I thank you, fellows. When you get settled we'll come over to arrange the first event."

"Let's not be in a hurry," suggested Harry. "I'd like to explore the lake and have a rest for a few days."

"So would I," agreed Walter.

"And I'm going to have a mess of trout tomorrow," declared Jack.

"Well, I'll leave you the *Undine*," answered Grant, as he and Perry followed the trapper to the canoes. "We haven't got the association banner yet, anyway," and he tipped a sly wink to Harry as they pushed off.

Grant received another cheer as Jerry drove the canoe across the channel, and presently two very happy lads climbed the winding steps to the island camp.

That evening the boys had a frolic in the water, swimming the channel and visiting quite promiscuously in their abbreviated garments. Then they had a jolly run along the sandy beach to the east of the shore camp, and as big Jerry chased pudgy Jack, the picture of the trapper's race with poor Danny Burns came back to Grant with curious clearness, and he laughed long and merrily at the recollection of those adventurous days. The sun lingered over the west shoulder of Button Rock as if he too enjoyed the merry-making, but finally fell from sight under horizontal clouds of entrancing delicacy. And

now the shore trees rang with the plaintive notes of the whippoorwill, while the tranquil bosom of the lake was only broken by the transient dipping of the swift dark swallows, or the plunge of a lusty pickerel.

Deane led his club in a race back to the island, though the astonished Jerry pushed him hard toward the finish. An impromptu concert by both clubs followed as a matter of course, and if the truth must be told, each tried its utmost to furnish the loudest and liveliest songs; quality seemed altogether a secondary consideration. This was really the beginning of the famous rivalry that terminated in the middle of September, when General Burton awarded the association banner to — but no matter. Many pleasant days and some very thrilling moments took place that memorable summer, but just what they were will be told later on. It will suffice to say at present that since swimming the channel our friends had risen steadily in the trapper's estimation, and while enjoying a thoughtful pipe later on, the old fellow almost decided to accept Grant's invitation, close the cabin, and take up his quarters on the island, in order to keep an eye on those "bandbox boys." Jerry was not so slow.

CHAPTER XII

SPECKLED BEAUTIES



JUST about dawn the following morning, Eugene might have been seen industriously plying one of Tim Anderson's picks in the vicinity of the little spring to the rear of the camp. As he turned up sod after sod he was rewarded with fair numbers

of angleworms—the large, red kind, commonly known as “night-walkers”; not so good as the smaller variety or white worms, for they are more tender on the hook, and do not show so well in the water. Still, they make excellent trout bait, especially for large fish. Having all but filled his own bait-box, Eugene scattered a handful of the moist earth in a second box, showing the initials “J. T.” on its perforated cover. Before he had quite filled

this to his satisfaction, a second figure glided noiselessly from the half-open door, and made its way down to the beach at once. Eugene presently followed after.

"Did you get a good lunch?" he whispered, a bit anxiously, for the fresh morning air was very appetizing.

"Trust me for that," replied Jack, significantly tapping a good-sized creel. "Here are two rods, and I've got a pint of hooks and flies in my book. Anything else?"

"Guess not," rejoined the former, doubtfully. "I was thinking, though, that it wouldn't be a bad idea to take a rifle. We might meet that panther Jerry Quick tried to bluff us about."

"Oh, pshaw!" answered Jack, who didn't relish the idea of encumbering himself any further. "We're going to have good sport fishing, so let the hunting go. I've got a good pistol with me, and besides, we're not going very near Red Ridge."

"Aren't we going to fish Mink Brook?"

"On the way back, perhaps. We're going to skirt Bald Hill and start in at Glen Gorge."

"Glen Gorge!"

"That's it, exactly. Glen Gorge Run flows through the valley between Bald Hill and Spoke Timber Mountain. See, here's a sketch I made under Jerry's

direction yesterday," and the enterprising Jack produced a yellow envelope covered with irregular pencil-marks strongly resembling hieroglyphics.

"I see," said Eugene, whose fancy must have been pleased by the names he made out after some study. "Are we going to visit Hawk's Nest Ravine, too?"

"Surely," smiled Jack. "Jerry says it's way ahead of Mink Brook, which bowls soberly along in a race to the river. It's a higher, rougher country, and the scenery all along is great."

"Is the fishing better?"

"I have Jerry's word for it. He said when you got one in Glen Gorge he was 'wuth totin' home.'"

"Good enough," said Eugene, pushing off the *Undine*. "It's hardly right to hook the only boat we've got at present, though; the fellows will be as mad as hornets when they find we've taken our lunch."

"I don't care," grumbled Jack, as he paddled with a will. "It's Walt's own fault. I told him to wire to the ranch for our canoes as soon as we accepted Grant's challenge; he wrote instead, and now we'll have to wait till they come."

"Wonder how Pietro and Tony feel about our change of plans," said Eugene, thoughtfully. "It's my opinion we'll have a lot more fun here than we

would have had at the lodge, though I'll miss the horses and Tony's songs."

"I'll miss Tony's cooking," retorted Jack, as they rounded a little point and the camp was lost to view. "Here, Gene, here's a bit of cold beef and a biscuit. There's salt in the paper." He took a biscuit himself and rested on the paddle a moment. "Yes," he reflected, "we're bound to have a good time, but I'll tell you what's a fact: we won't have any soft thing beating that club, though I know the fellows think so."

"I don't believe we will, either," Eugene agreed. "Grant showed what good stuff he was made of last winter, and Perry certainly showed great nerve with those cowardly river men."

"That's what he did, and he can pull a great stroke, too," added Jack. "It'll depend a good deal on the boat-race, I imagine."

"It doesn't count any more than the trap-shooting or the largest trout."

"Well, I mean to have the largest trout," remarked Jack, conclusively. "Fishing's about the only thing I can do well, if I do say it, and I am going to fish all summer till I get a regular 'sockdolager.' That'll give me all the medal I want."

"If I can win anything, I'll be satisfied," said Eugene, more modestly. "You see there are only seven events, so somebody'll be left out."

"Yes, but Grant said there would be two medals for the cat-boat race, so I advise you to try for that with me, Gene."

"All right, Jack, it's a go. Arthur's going to try for the clay-pigeon championship, and will probably shoot with Walt or Paul."

"And they'll win it, too. Hear that brook?" inquired Jack, brightening up.

"Sure thing. But it's a long way off yet. Give me the paddle."

"Very well," said Jack, passing the cedar forward and again getting out his map. "Keep her pointed up toward Bald Hill there, for we've got to strike through the woods to the falls."

"Mink Brook is making pretty sweet music, whether it's good fishing or not," said Eugene, who was anxious to try for a speckled beauty at once. "It's nearer, too, Jack."

"Ho, that's nothing. It's only about two miles through the woods, anyway. When we strike Mink Brook we'll fish up to the lake and walk along the shore to the canoe. You can judge by that time which is the better brook."

Eugene said nothing more, but paddled steadily. In less than an hour the *Undine* was drawn on to the beach and hidden among some willows. The boys immediately struck off through the woods, fol-

lowing Jerry's directions as closely as possible. They found that the lake was hidden in the broad plateau formed by Button Rock on the west and north, Red Ridge and Spoke Timber Mountain on the east and south, and Bald Hill on the south and west; for as they skirted the last mountain, they seemed to be steadily descending into a lower and still more rugged country. It was true that Bald Hill from a little distance looked bare and even bleak, but as the lads neared its base, they observed that a fringe of pitch-pines covered it for nearly half a mile toward the summit, and that Glen Gorge, looking toward Spoke Timber, was literally walled in by great shelving ledges of bluish gray rock. Even before they had traversed half the distance from the lake, they could hear the falls of Glen Gorge roaring merrily, at which they quickened their steps unconsciously.

"That's music, I guess," observed Jack, proudly. "Jerry said to start in at the pool below the falls. I'm going to try a white miller or a silver doctor. You can try bait or take your pick from my book."

"No, thanks. Bait is pretty good six days in the week, I think. My, but that's a likely looking pool!" exclaimed Eugene, as the lads emerged from the woodland.

"Yes, and very pretty falls, too," added the former. "All of twenty feet high."

The boys worked cautiously down the ledges to the clatter of some swift-winged kingfishers that seemed to resent this bold intrusion, for they flew up over the falls to a dead hemlock, and then back down stream as if their peace of mind had been thoroughly disturbed for that day at least. The cawing of distant crows and the mewing of cat-birds in the neighboring alders mingled harmoniously with the sweet song of the redbreast, the sullen roar of the cascade, and the gurgle of the brook as it gleamed and twinkled on its way "To join the brimming river." Poplars and white birches lightened the deep green of the surrounding woods, and the bright sunshine, striking the west side of the gorge, fell upon the crest of the waterfall and then upon the yeasty surge below until the pool fairly danced with light.

Jack lost no time in jointing his bamboo rod, beginning with the tip. He next attached a fine gut leader to the light silk fly line, after which he looped the miller to the leader. Descending through the tall, damp grass bordering the stream, and keeping well out of sight, he began letting out line in a very clever manner until he had some sixteen feet going from a pole half that length. Then he made his first cast. The fly struck at the edge of some slimy rocks just where the water leaves the pool with a rush, and Jack, by delicate wrist play, drew it gently forward.

There was a splash and a pretty gleam of pink. The angler brought the rod up deftly enough, hooked the fish, and then drowned it a moment later by holding its head up stream in the swift current.

"It's a small one—hardly eight inches," was the boy's quiet comment, as he slipped the catch into his companion's creel. "Say, Gene, try a 'night-walker' on them."

"Oh, go ahead. I like to see you throw a fly just as well."

"No, bait up and throw out. The fishing won't be half so good later on."

So Eugene selected a good-sized bait, which he hooked through the middle, "so that the ends would wiggle," and after drawing some yards of silk free of the pole, twirled the hook in his right hand and sent it out into the middle of the pool, just clear of the falls. It disappeared in the spume at once, and then the line stiffened to the buzzing of the reel.

"It's a big one!" cried Jack, as Eugene hooked. "Give him the spring of the pole, old man, or he'll wreck your line."

"I guess not," replied Eugene, coolly, as he began reeling in. "If I can keep the slack line in, I'm all right."

The trout struggled gamely for fully three minutes, plunging this way and that, and finally shooting up

under the falls for a brief sulk. It soon grew tired of this sort of thing, and started off for the river. Eugene now gave it the full spring of the rod, and working it toward the shore, drew it out on the beach, splashing and dripping. Jack grasped it at once and ended its suffering by a brisk rap just over the gills with his knife.

"This beats bass-fishing in Grouse Creek all hollow," he cried, producing a tiny tape-line. "Ten inches and a half, Gene, and on the second cast! Say, won't the fellows be down here to-morrow!"

"Yes, if this luck holds out. I'm of the opinion, though, that it can't last long," and such proved the case. Though Jack tried bait, green drakes, and brown hackles by turn, nothing but a scant seven-inch fish was taken after this ; so it was decided to fish on down stream without further delay. Eugene won the toss, and prepared to leave at once with the understanding that Jack would not follow under half an hour. This would give the brook time to settle after Eugene, though the leader in all such cases, as a matter of etiquette, is supposed to bear in mind that another is shortly to follow, and to disturb the muddy bottoms and old brush as little as possible.

Eugene, having selected a trio of flies from Jack's book, took his share of the lunch, which he tucked away in the pocket of his jacket, and then started

off. He had good sport for nearly an hour, fishing the pools and eddies very carefully. By that time he had captured a dozen fair-sized trout, and had returned as many under six inches to the water. He judged, too, that he had come a good mile, and decided to await his comrade. He therefore seated himself comfortably on the mossy bank and arranged the fish evenly in his creel among some moist, fragrant ferns. He thought he must be nearing the end of Glen Gorge, for on looking up the perpendicular ledges toward the tops, he saw that about thirty yards down stream, and about fifty feet above the brook, the defile narrowed to such an extent that one could have stepped from precipice to precipice with perfect safety. A pine log of goodly size had fallen across the narrow gorge, and as the boy gazed up at the dark, dense woodland and bright sky beyond, he felt that Jerry had indeed directed them to the right spot for a day's outing.

In a little while Jack appeared. He too seemed much impressed with the wild beauty of the ravine, and mechanically slinging off his creel, turned down the tops of his high rubber boots for a brief respite.

"What luck?" inquired Eugene, displaying his catch.

"About the same," replied Jack, holding up a lusty trout by the gills. "I got this fellow in that

long black eddy near the falls. Notice how dark he is."

"Nice fish," continued the former, testing its weight. "I guess a pound."

"Perhaps ; but he'll hardly do for Grant to bother with, though he's twelve inches long."

"I think we should have live minnows or white grubs for large trout," suggested Eugene. "We may get some big ones as we strike deeper water."

"It's easy enough to get grubs," returned Jack, looking about. "You can find them in old pine logs."

"There's an old pine up there, if we could get to it," said the other, pointing to the tree spanning the mountain cleft.

"Heigh-ho!" exclaimed Jack, getting out the yellow envelope. "This ends Glen Gorge, Gene. It's half a mile to Hawk's Nest, and from there about a mile to —"

"Jack!"

Eugene's monosyllabic ejaculation must have struck the speaker most unpleasantly, for he allowed the carefully prepared map to flutter from his hand, and then very deliberately followed with his startled eyes the direction indicated by his companion's quivering forefinger. He needed no further guidance, for against the rich foliage that crowned the ledge

top, and standing upon the very log of which they had just spoken, he made out with a start the unmistakable form of a huge panther—gaunt, tawny, and forbidding in the extreme. It seemed to the excited lads as if the very birds suddenly ceased their songs, and even the pleasant gurgling of the mountain stream sounded off in the distance. After a moment's hush Jack cleared his throat with an effort, brought his brows together in an earnest scowl, and then began fumbling for his pistol.

"It's the 'King of the Ridge,'" muttered Eugene, solemnly, as his comrade maladroitly drew forth and cocked the weapon. "Oh, Jack, see what a mark!"

"I can't shoot," whined Jack, who was already reproaching himself for not having followed his chum's suggestion in regard to the rifle.

"Rest the barrel against that sapling," whispered the former. "Take good aim, quick! he's going to move!"

The lithe animal could be seen distinctly; the short, jagged ears were thrown inquiringly forward, but there was ease and repose in the whole body; the king, for it was certainly he, appeared to be enjoying a sun bath after his early morning meal, and had not yet detected the presence of the young sportsmen in the gorge below.

"Keep your nerve," cautioned Eugene, as Jack

leaned forward and very deftly placed the barrel against the maple—not the best way to shoot a pistol. There was a second hush as the marksman took aim.

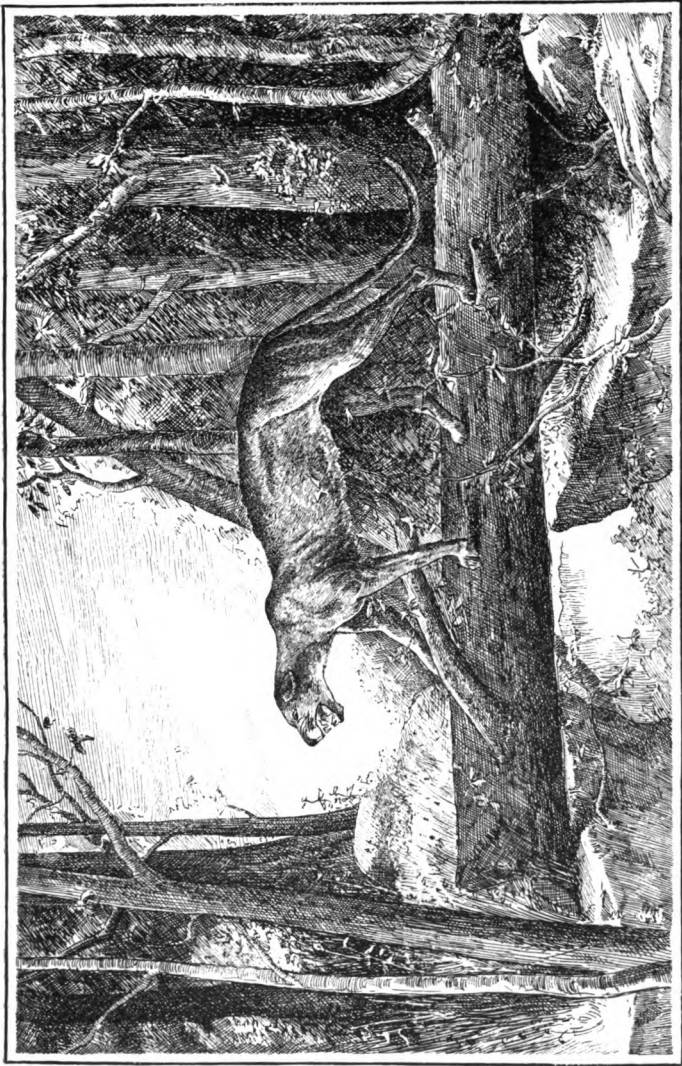
“Crack!”

With a shriek of rage the panther dropped his ears flat on his neck, his jaws opened in a wicked snarl, disclosing a gleaming set of teeth, and his back arched pugnaciously. Then, whipping his long tail nervously across the trunk, and tossing his lean head menacingly, he started briskly across the log, each muscle tense as steel, and continued to scream as Jack fired the remaining five shots, one upon the other, like a string of geese.

“You grazed him that first shot, anyway,” began Eugene, consolingly, when the king had bounded out of sight among the evergreens on the left, a mere streak of brown.

“Plague the luck!” moaned Jack, rising to his feet and beginning a fretful march up and down the bank. “Plague such luck, I say!” he cried, irritably. “Six shots, and never dusted the fur!”

“Oh, don’t mind that,” replied the other, good-naturedly, for he saw that Jack’s temper had risen steadily since the panther’s evanishment, and was likely to continue rising. “It wasn’t a big mark, besides being elevated and moving.”



THEN HE STARTED BRISKLY ACROSS THE LOG. Page 152.

"It looked as big as a house, and you know it," argued Jack, passionately. "Oh, if we'd only brought a rifle, we'd have dropped him into the ravine like a shot rabbit."

Eugene pondered awhile in silence, while Jack fumed about like a wet hen. The former realized that such chances are very few and far between, and regretted the absence of his trusty rifle just as much as his companion, and perhaps more so, because he had proposed taking it; but he was rather inclined to view things philosophically.

"This proves that the panther doesn't stay on Red Ridge, anyway," he said hopefully. "He looked to me about as fat as a toothpick. Maybe it isn't the same one."

"Don't care if it isn't," growled Jack, as he broke his revolver to look through the barrel. "I ought to get a leather medal for this morning's work."

"Oh, go along and forget it," pleaded Eugene. "It's just hunter's luck, and you shouldn't grumble over it. I don't think that thirty-eight would kill it, anyway."

"That's nonsense," retorted Jack, angrily. "You don't seem to realize that we've missed the chance of the summer. I wouldn't have had this happen for fifty dollars — no, not for seventy-five."

"What can you do about it?" asked Eugene,

pleasantly. "We've got the upper hand of the island boys, as it is."

"In our minds," grumbled Jack, petulantly.

"No, in reality, for we can scatter poisoned meat around that log, or put traps in the grass at the ends. I'll bet that's his regular runway."

"You heard what Jerry said," replied Jack, in a moderated tone, as he reloaded the weapon. "I suppose some fellows would shy off this brook over what's happened; but I'm not afraid of a sneaking panther in broad daylight, not a bit, Gene, so you can take the pistol," he concluded, with admirable courage.

"Well, if you're going on first, I may as well keep it," said Eugene, reaching for the revolver. "He looked pretty mean, Jack, and may cross again."

"He's probably two miles from here, and going faster every minute. So here goes," and with an audible sigh Jack glanced at the time. "Nearly nine o'clock. If we hurry, we can get back at noon."

He baited his hook and turned on his heel without another word. Eugene followed in about fifty minutes, having tarried in the hope of getting a shot. The boys fished the half mile to Hawk's Nest Ravine with varying success, for the run broadens out in many places between the two clefts, and deep water is scarce.

Before eleven o'clock the lads again met at a promising pool about halfway down Hawk's Nest. Jack had captured several good-sized fish since entering the ravine, and seemed to feel better as a consequence. He was pretty hungry, too, and was found contentedly munching a cheese sandwich when his companion joined him.

"They get a little bigger as the brook broadens," he observed, turning the creel-lid with the toe of his boot. "I've left that pool for you, Gene. It's only about a mile to the big brook, now, and you can fish it first all the way."

"Oh, we'll divide it," Eugene answered, seating himself with his back to a poplar. "We've got almost enough for a mess, anyway."

"Yes, but we'll want to take a couple of dozen to the island."

"That's so. I hadn't thought of that. They might be fishing in the lake to-day, though."

"It isn't likely, with one canoe for the whole party."

"Jack, they'll have it in for us when we get back. Jerry may cuff us."

"He'd better not try it. It isn't his canoe," answered Jack, with some spirit.

Then they nibbled away in silence.

"Oh, Gene, if I'd only put a shot into the king's left shoulder," continued Jack, irrelevantly. "Wouldn't

it have been great sport to have carried him into camp on a pole between us?"

"Yes, or had his head and tail sticking out of the canoe, so that both clubs could have seen them."

"Well, I guess it wasn't to be," sighed Jack, gazing absently down the gleaming eddy. "I almost wish the fellows—our fellows—didn't hear about my shooting."

"I'll not tell them," responded Eugene, heartily. "When I go off on a lark with a fellow, I'll stand by him, Jack, and you know it."

"And so would I. If there's anything to be gained by what we know, we ought to be the gainers, Gene—you and I."

"And we will be," said Gene, extending his hand as they arose.

"Now have a try at that pool," urged Jack, once more his good-natured self. "It's the 'troutiest' bit of water we've struck yet."

Eugene studied the pretty waterfall, which was spanned by a small tree-trunk, and told himself that Jack was right. A succession of shelving ledges and many swift ripples gave the water sufficient impetus to send it bowling merrily over the fall. At the foot of the little cascade the spume bubbled six or eight inches high, and then melted crisply into the dark

bosom of the pool. A birch tree had fallen into the brook from the right bank looking down stream, and though the tree was all but severed at the base, the branches rose straight from the oblique trunk, and seemed to be blooming finely. Little islands of foam eddied on either side about the mossy banks, and stray leaves or a sailing blossom dappled the amber surface of the shallows above the yellow gravel.

The pool, perhaps fifty feet in length, by twenty in width at the head, narrowed to such an extent that it was scarcely six feet wide at the farther end. The brook as a consequence rushed more swiftly toward the lower end, and the boys could see that the stillest water occurred at about the middle, after it had lost the swift momentum from the upper falls, though for that matter there was not a sluggish drop of water in the basin. Hawk's Nest, too, is more open than Glen Gorge, and though the ledges rise as sheer about it, they are wider apart, and there is more verdure and less gloom between.

"Yes, it looks 'trouty,' and I'll toss you for the first try," proposed Eugene, for he was anxious to humor his chum after the latter's hard luck. "Heads or tails?"

"Tails!" cried Jack, as Eugene twirled the copper. It struck with the Indian's head upward, and

Gene accordingly prepared for the second noteworthy incident of the morning.

"I don't want anything but a lively 'night-walker' on my hook," said he, looking into the bait-boxes very carefully. "Now, Jack, don't say a word if I land a two-pounder."

He hooked a large bait through the middle, drew a rod of line clear of the pole, and crossing to the west side of the brook to prevent his shadow from falling on the pool, worked warily toward the falls, coming to a stand just at the upper side of the log. He then threw out, directing his cast at the foam. The bait sank, rose several times, and finally eddied off to the opposite side, where it was struck and mangled by a small fish. Eugene drew the line in, and selecting another bait, again cast for the froth. Before the snell had fairly disappeared, the line straightened, the pole bent all but double, and the whir and screech of the reel sounded above the cascade.

"Stop him!" called Jack, excitedly, from the other side. "He'll leave the pool!"

Eugene raised the rod as he had done early in the morning, but this was a different fish. The tip snapped like a carrot as the line stiffened, and then the lad, perhaps fearing the twenty-five yards of silk would run out before the trout turned, leaned

over the log and extended his arm as far as possible, at the same time cleverly keeping the rod at an angle in the hope of breaking the final shock when the line should become spent. He held the rod in a loose grasp, and endeavored to keep his arm supple, which would have been all very well had he realized just then the size and weight of the trout he had hooked. But he did not, and as the line ran out with a final whir and click, he raised the pole a little higher. Then came the test, for the fish, having descended the cascade below the pool, continued on in the swift water, just a flash of green and pink. The bamboo straightened in Eugene's limp grasp, and then was jerked from his hand with a force that carried it several feet through the air before touching water. The next instant it was bobbing this way and that down stream, while the disappointed angler, with hard-drawn lips and blanched face, stood stock-still, watching it with flashing eyes. Then he vaulted the stick, striking the pool with a great splash and sinking to his armpits.

"There it goes!" came the encouraging words from Jack, who for a few brief seconds had been too excited to speak. "He's still on, Gene. Swim for it!"

As any one knows, it is much easier to swim in deep water than walk, especially when one is mate-

rially assisted by the current, as Eugene was on this occasion. He struck out resolutely for the vanishing pole, and presently discovered it in the lower swift water. After one unsuccessful effort he brought it up, and with trembling hands caught the line and drew it in — first hopefully, then recklessly as he realized the true condition of affairs. The leader and snelled hook finally reached him, the latter with a tiny bit of the gill still clinging to it.

Eugene staggered out on shore and quickly crashed through the bordering bushes to the higher bank, where he stood panting like one who has run a mile. His first impulse was to break the rod and rasp the line to shreds, but on second thought slowly reeled in the silk and disjointed the pole, which, after removing the reel, he tossed toward the poplar.

"There!" he cried vindictively, "they're out of the way. Did you ever see such a fish, Jack?"

"No, and I didn't *see* him," answered Jack, gravely. "I can imagine what he looks like, though."

"He felt like a four-pounder," commented the former, tersely, seating himself upon a rock and holding a boot up. "Take a pull at these, Jack, till I empty them." His voice sounded hard.

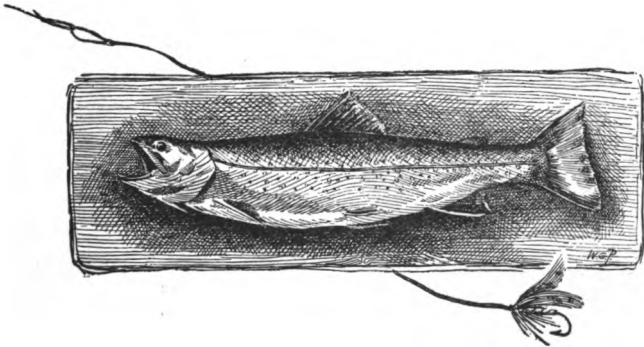
"Aren't we having the worst luck in the world?" said Jack, when the boots had been removed. "It makes a fellow half wild to think about it."

"We'll have our turn yet," replied Eugene, setting his thin lips firmly. "Jack, as we said before, we've got to hang together through thick and thin. We both were a bit off to-day, but we'll be the gainers in the end, you see if we aren't. I've had enough of trout-fishing for a while, and think we'd better start for the canoe at once."

"I'm willing," responded Jack, who no longer lamented his poor marksmanship, and who somehow felt that Eugene and he had been drawn more closely together since the almost laughable plunge into the brook. "We can take the ledge back, and then cut across to the lake."

"All right," said Eugene, drawing on the boots. "I'm warm enough now, but I want to keep moving."

The rather doleful procession then started through the woods.



CHAPTER XIII

THE WILDCAT HOLE



"MILL Eddy next stop!"

So sang the trainman of the mountain local about the time Jack and Eugene carried the *Undine* from the willows and pushed off for camp, whereupon a young fellow arose from a rear

seat in the last car, and inquired the distance to the station mentioned.

"Four miles," answered the railroader, gruffly.

"Don't grunt," objected the passenger, coolly lighting a cheroot in spite of the printed rule at the end of the car. "How fast are we movin'?"

"About thirty-five an hour," replied the man, more civilly.

"So I thought."

"Say, there's no smokin' allowed here. See that sign?"

"Then I'll stand out here, cap'n," said the passenger, quickly opening the rear door and stepping to the platform.

"No ridin' on the platform — against the rules."

"But I'm only goin' to the Eddy."

"It's a mile or more, yet. Get up off that step, or you'll break your neck."

"I guess not."

Before the trainman could grasp the audacious passenger, he had dropped his bundle to the road-bed, and having crouched on the lowest step, with his left leg held almost parallel to the rails, let go the iron guard with his right hand the moment he swung himself off. The heel of his left boot ploughed into the cinder path between the tracks, and he leaned far back in a dead run, thus retaining his equilibrium. After running a dozen yards he began to slow up, finally coming to a halt with a step or two backwards.

"That ain't his first drop from a flyer," commented the railroader, as a couple of interested travellers crowded about in time to see the man wave an affected adieu to the vanishing train. "There's no good in that lad, I'll be bound — a mighty queer-looking chap." And you would have said the same had you seen him.

As soon as he had recovered his possessions, which,

by the way, were enclosed in a neat newspaper parcel, he crossed the down track and entered a by-turning leading from the railroad. Having climbed part way up the steep trail, he seated himself on a log and untied the bundle.

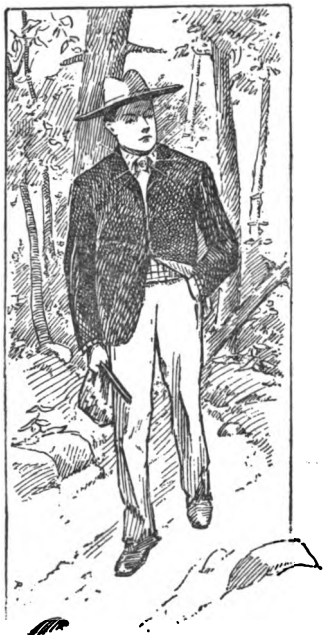
Not far from this point stands the KQ signal-tower. The day operator, having closed the block and entered the time of the local's departure, leaned out of the window in the hope of seeing more of the stranger who had swung so neatly from number three. These tower operators, as a rule, lead a very monotonous existence, especially those who are situated along the lonely stretches of the great railroads. They welcome the dailies that thoughtful trainmen not infrequently toss from the rear platforms, and they look for and grow to expect occasional friendly smiles from engineers, express clerks, and colored porters. Through the winter the crows come to the KQ tower regularly at noon, and pick up the crumbs that the track-hands drop at dinner. Through the summer the operator has more to amuse and divert him: a party is rowing in Handsome Eddy, perhaps, or some poor fellow, weary and foot-sore, stops to ask the distance to Buffalo. But though this particular operator had seen some grave and many amusing things since entering the company's service, he had never before watched a man on a hillside.

Having opened the package, the stranger drew forth a sombrero, a huge revolver, and a flask of liquor. He placed the articles upon a rock, after which he carefully removed his luxuriant mustaches, then his sideboards, and finally, after much pulling, a shock of very red hair. At this last move the astonished operator all but fell from the window, for as the stranger was rather bald on the top of his head, it really looked for a moment as if he had scalped himself. These preliminaries over, the man removed his coat and vest, and drew off a pair of snuff-colored overalls. He rolled the hirsute articles in the cap he had worn on the train, smoothed the creases out of the white flannel trousers, and donned the waistcoat; but instead of the dingy yellow vest, you saw a very "horsy" affair—a gorgeous red check on very white linen. He then reversed his collar and cuffs, turned a kind of disk-like shirt bosom one quarter to the right, and carefully readjusted a lawn tie over the fresh front. But this was not all. Taking a hugh paste diamond from his pocket, he screwed it into the four-in-hand, ending by dusting his boots with a large bandanna.

"That's a queer proceeding," thought the operator, as the man tied some odds and ends in the handkerchief. "Wonder what he's up to!" He could not of course see all the stranger did, but easily

observed sufficient to worry him for the rest of the day.

But the stranger was not contemplating any villainy — at least not just then. He never turned his attention to the little building, and, in fact, seemed perfectly oblivious of his surroundings. Having run a short stick through the bundle, — the infallible sign of the unfortunate "hobo," — he continued sedately up the trail, leaving the man in the tower staring after in open-mouthed astonishment.



THE MYSTERIOUS PEDESTRIAN

The mysterious pedestrian appeared to be well pleased with the general character of the country, shuffling along over the rough roads as though in no hurry to complete his journey. He reached Thedford's "ranch" about two o'clock, having come a somewhat roundabout way from the river. Here he purchased a meal, and

casually inquired the way to the lake — he had come up for a little fishing, and expected his things later on. Honest John Thedford candidly regarded the diamond and waistcoat with suspicion, while Betty, who had just come in from the neighboring fields, stood in the doorway and turned her pretty blue eyes on the guest in mild surprise and disapproval. But the man soon left, taking the road that ran behind the house, and this time the child's gaze did not follow the stranger, as it had followed a certain runaway the fall before.



BETTY

In passing down a pretty glen to the north of Button Rock, the man observed a figure far ahead in a twist of the trail. He hurried instinctively, but the leader, detecting the sound of footfalls, also increased his speed, finally disappearing in a dip of the road. Directly the pedestrian beneath the sombrero hailed him, and on coming to the hollow, saw the man by the roadside. He was standing with one foot in the road-bed and the other on the bank, as

though in readiness to flee should the notion strike him. The pursuer was the first to speak.

"If you're goin' to stampede, I guess I'll pull up," he said characteristically, coming to a stand.

"I ain't afeerd," grinned the youth, breaking off a leaf from the laurel. "I reckon ye ain't agin me."

"Don't know a thing about you," answered the former, indifferently. "You look like a good lad, though. Have a smoke?"

"I will that," and he managed to hold his ground while the other slowly advanced.

They lighted their cigars.

"Did you think I was goin' to rope you?"

"I didn't know. Ye act most like them perlice constables."

At that the first speaker cleared, his throat, felt of his diamond, and attempted to bluster.

"What if I am?" he demanded. "You ain't done nothin', I reckon."

The other's pale face flushed, and he dropped his glance to the mossy slope. He was a good-looking swain, tall and powerful.

"I guess we ain't acquainted," he said, shrugging his broad shoulders. Then, after a pause, "I'm Matt Flint, the jail-bird."

"Ho, ho! I wondered why you looked so yellor,"

continued the bedizened youth. "Kind of hidin' out?" he inquired confidentially.

"I served my time — six months the end of June," said Flint, sullenly.

"Come off. What you 'leery' for, then?"

"I ain't afeerd, only I'm nervous-like round home here, bein' raised in the mountains; but I can't keep away, nohow, and I know the quarry lads'll jeer me."

"I'm right sorry, Matt. Tell me what they sent you for, so't I can round you up."

"Don't you know? Seems like everybody I pass looks at me like I was a bad one."

"Oh, don't mind that," said the man of the checked waistcoat—he was about to say, "That never bothers me," but repressed the words in the nick of time. "Let's have the story. I'll not say a word."

"It won't matter much, 'cause everybody knows it: I tried to down Davy Anderson last Octoby, and hook the old man's boodle, but —"

"You missed fire," suggested the listener, as Matt hesitated.

"That's it!" and the mountaineer glanced admiringly at his fascinating acquaintance. "Be that a diamond?"

"Sure. Did you think it was glass?"

"I couldn't just guess. I heard tell of 'em, but it's the first I ever see. It's kind of blindin'."

"It won't douse your peepers," assured the traveller, polishing the stone with a small square of chamois he kept in his vest pocket. "Tell me, Matt, who was this Davy Anderson?"

"The quarry boss's son. He fit like a cornered catamount, an' run me off."

"And you only got six months?" gasped the stranger.

"Tim didn't press the charge," said Matt, gratefully. "The jedge said it was to kind of sober me up."

"You look sober enough now, that's a fact."

"An' I feel sober," said Matt, puffing quietly. "Tim writ to come an' take my place along with the top-hands. Tim ain't the worst man alive, only hot-headed."

"Don't you go, Matt," advised the stranger, quickly. "The boys'll have you down for a rogue, and'll pester you to death."

"But Tim writ to come certain and begin again."

"Yes, and he'll hold back your pay to get square, and'll put you through the mill just for 'roots.'"

"I dunno."

"But I know. Besides, you can't do a day's work, man. You're as yeller as a pumpkin, and you'll get the consumption if you work in the hot sun too soon."

"I dunno but you're right."

"Of course I'm right. Set down here, and let me tell you a few of my plans."

When they had seated themselves in the cool shade of a fir tree, the natty pedestrian continued:—

"You see it's just this way, Matt: I'm a bit new to this here range, and I'd like to keep along with a man like you, who knows the ground. See?"

"But I ain't fit comp'ny for the likes of you," argued Matt.

"Oh, that's nothin'. I'm somethin' of a gent right enough,"—he flicked the headlight nonchalantly,— "but the fact is, Matt, I'm broke—clean strapped," he concluded bluntly.

For a moment Matt contemplated the frayed trousers, then scratched his head thoughtfully.

"Be you goin' to quarryin'?"

"Not much. I ain't hammerin' no stone out of a mountain through the dog-days." He dropped his voice to a confidential undertone, at which Matt unconsciously drew nearer. "I can make ten thousand dollars this summer just like rollin' off a log," he added mysteriously.

The quarryman gasped his surprise.

"You ain't got a gold mine, have ye? I've heard tell of 'em, but I never see one."

The stranger produced the flask.

"Have some stimulants, Matt. They'll brace you up."

The jail-bird reached eagerly for the little vessel.

"Here she goes," he said, and drank quickly. "That's the genuine rye, I reckon."

"It's a gent's drink," was the careless reply. "Are you much on the talk, Matt?"

"Not me. Do I look glibber, now?"

The stranger eyed him curiously.

"I guess you're on the level," he said, somewhat grandly, "so I'll let you into that gold mine."

Matt drew still nearer, and almost hesitated to breathe.

"In the first place, my name's McCaffrey — Kidder McCaffrey, and by rights I'm a crackerjack cowman, or cowboy, as they calls 'em here in the East. I came to New York with six cars of export steers, what was sent to England: big fellers, goin' sixteen hundred to the head. I got off on a 'rattykaboo,' which means I was larkin' some, and sold my return ticket to Colorady for a twenty-dollar note. This kind of melted, too, and I got to hangin' round the river with an old pal, who owns a sailin' boat to make a livin' with. You won't blab a word of this to a livin' soul, Matt?"

The rustic shook his head vehemently.

"Well, last Monday we got a passenger for Jersey,

and as he looked to be well heeled, we run a 'sandy' on him and tried to swipe his roll, seein' ours was crimped that bad it would have took a microscope to find it."

"Did ye get holt of it?"

"No. The young cub dropped it in the house we was into, and we couldn't corral it. We couldn't bluff him, so we tied him down and crossed the river to see if his folks was takin' on. We learnt his old man was a regular cattle king, and thunk to hold the lad for a ransom, which we fixed at ten thousand," continued Kiddy, coolly. "I left my pal guardin' at about midnight, and crossed to York for grub. When I got back to Riverside with the grub, I nat'rally looked to Jersey, and what do you s'pose I seen?"

"The perlice constables a-clubbin' your pal?"

"I couldn't 'a' seen that very easy, 'cause the river's a mile wide there. No, the hull house was one sheet of flame, an' bein' old and dry, burnt like a haystack on a windy day."

"It must 'a' riled ye," commented the interested mountaineer.

"Mad! I was that mad I could have drawn my gun on the loony folks, who was runnin' round cheerin' it for a 'lovely sight,' and a 'fittin' celebration,' with me knowin' what was happenin' *inside*. The steamboats was blowin' and tootin' like mad, too,

and when the old thing tumbled off into the cliff I was that shook the sweat fairly rolled off'n me."

"It ain't no wonder," said Matt, his wits sharpened by excitement.

"It wouldn't have been so bad, only you couldn't put no dependence on Val. He's that big he can't move faster'n a goat, so when he smelt the smoke he leaves the lad tied up and goes down to fight the fire with a broomstick, I s'pose. The chimney fell on to him and everything cracked, only then the youngster run in and dragged Val out. But I didn't know that till night, when I see a paper and read where Val was took — to a Hoboken hospital, where they had to rivet his leg."

"I reckon you hid in the bresh all day."

"That's no lie. I went to Central Park and hid in some pipes that they was goin' to put into the ground to carry water from the aqueducts there. It was kind of lonesome, so I got to readin' the papers I took from the lad when we downed him in the old house. There was a very pretty book, a lot of printed talk about paintin' things red up at the lake this summer."

"I know!" cried Matt, bounding to his feet. "I saw two young lads fishin' in Hawk's Nest this mornin'."

Kiddy's eyebrows shot up.

"So soon! Well, I says to myself, 'Kiddy, if the

youngster comes out right side up, get Val and down him again where there won't be no "coppers" nor fresh lads a-settin' old houses afire for the Fourth of July.' That'll be here at the lake. Wasn't that good argument?"

"Great," snickered Matt. "I never heard the beat of ye, Kidder."

"Call me Kiddy; it sounds more like my poor pal," proposed the Westerner, affably. "Well, I crawled out of the pipes at dark, but just as I got to the street I heard the newsboys shoutin' the fire. I got a copy, and was took back considerable by what I read; but after hearin' how Val's leg was broke and the boy was safe, soon gathered my nerve. But I couldn't get to see Val without bein' roped, so I fixed up and took the boat for Coney Island Wednesday mornin'. The island was crowded with folks, and all sorts of doings was goin' on. I got to a rifle range where a feller was shoutin': 'Hit the bull's-eye and get a good cigar. Three shots for a nickel.' I wasn't much weightied with 'mazuma,' havin' less than a dollar in my clothes, and I wasn't hankerin' for no free smokes. So I said, 'Ain't you got no better prizes, old rattlelip?' 'Yes, sonny,' says the barker, 'a genuine ten-carat South African diamond, purchased direct from the Kimberley mines, to the first man to break the bouncin' ball; now you see it,

now you don't. Two shots for a nickel, and only a few left.' At that I caught sight of the ball, now and then jumpin' up above a green board like a flagged antelope, it was that anxious to see the doings at t'other end of the range. I put down a dime, fired twice at a target to see if the gun was sighted fine, then drew down on the ball and whanged away. It busted like a ripe melon, and the barker handed me down the gem." Kiddy burnished it. "After that he hired me for the afternoon, and I give an exhibition. We had a big crowd before long, and they took up three collections, for I was hittin' a swingin' ball backwards ev'ry clip, lookin' through a hand-glass. When I found I had enough to take me out of the city, I didn't lose no time in quittin' the State, and here I am. I got this vest for half a dollar on the Bowery last night. This shirt front was only a quarter. Whenever I want a new pattern, I give it a twist and hook it down. Ain't it a peach?"

"It's kind of blindin', Kidder — Kiddy, I mean," said Matt, all admiration. "If ye'll do the cuttin', I'll go to work as top-hand. I ain't good at markin' out, like ye."

"That's right, Matt, and we'll divy up, half an' half."

They shook hands heartily.

"How many boys came up to the lake, Matt?"

"Didn't hear tell. I heard 'em a-singin' like Sam Hill last night, though."

"And how far is their camp from here?"

"They've got two camps: one on Floatin' Isle, one on the east shore. They're off about five mile by trail, four through the bresh."

"Well, we don't want to go too close," said Kiddy, after due consideration.

"No, we don't, 'cause Jerry Quick would make it onpleasant."

"Who's Jerry Quick?"

Matt told him.

"Well, we can hobble Jerry if he gets mean," remarked Kiddy, promptly. "Now, Matt, think hard and tell me if there ain't some place we can go to where nobody'll find us."

"I don't have to think more'n a day," said Matt, with a show of pride. "I know a place where nobody ain't ever been, only me. It's in the high ledge by lower Glen Gorge, where those boys was fishin' this mornin'. I call it the 'Wildcat Hole.'"

"Is it a cave?"

"Yes, and a reg'lar one. Ye either go up a tree, or come down a rope to the front door, only there ain't no door — jest a hole in the rocks."

"That sounds right. How far from the lake?"

"Nigh two miles."

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"Is it big enough to live in?"

"Big enough! It's a kind of nat'ral room in the rocks. If we can keep the cats out, we'll have it right snug."

Kiddy produced his six-shooter—an impressive object, truly, from which Matt instinctively recoiled.

"Don't let neither Jerry nor the cats bother you, Matt," said he, confidently. "Stick to me and *you'll* wear diamonds, too."

"I'm a-goin' to stick," replied Matt, with a nervous laugh. "Shall we go up to the cave now?"

"Yes," said Kiddy, taking up his bundle. "Make through the brush, Matt. It won't help none to follow the trails."

The men walked rapidly, and little was said on the way. They presently skirted Tim Anderson's quarry, and though half a mile distant, could distinctly hear the metallic ring of cutters' tools and the crash of broken stone and hardpan as the top-hands emptied their wheelbarrows at the dump. It reminded Matt of old times, and he sighed audibly. But Kiddy was glib.

"That's them, beltin' away like they had a grudge agin the mountain," he said derisively, as Matt lingered to listen.

"Ye beat my time, Kidder," said the top-hand, honestly. "Ye have an argyment for all the doin's."

"I don't say I'm always in the right of it," confessed Kiddy, with an air of lofty condescension, "but my pal Val seemed to think I was pretty well on toward the limit."

"Ye be, too," pursued Matt, who had gleaned a fair idea of Bowery slang from itinerant quarrymen. "We're crossin' Mink Brook now. When we get above Glen Gorge Run, we can whip through the bresh to the cave. It's in a kind of rock pile at the foot of Bald Hill, an' Red Ridge joins on, but the brook breaks in betwixt at the outlet of the lake."



MATT FLINT

"I see," said McCaffrey, readily. "Then Red Ridge follows the east shore nigh to the schoolboy outfit."

"Ye have it," replied Matt, turning to get another good look at the wonder behind him. "Yonder's the run. It ain't two mile to the gorge."

Kiddy seemed much impressed with Panther Ledge, as it has been known since the autumn of that year. He had, of course, seen many rougher cliffs in his travels through the Rockies, but none, you may be

sure, that offered greater possibilities in the way of concealment. From Spoke Timber Mountain Panther Ledge looks like a huge pile of gray blocks dropped by some childish hand. At irregular distances parallel fissures streak this mass like bent and blackened wires of a cast-off gridiron. The tenacious scrub oaks, a few saplings, and an occasional pitch-pine have crowded out all other vegetation, save perhaps a patch of laurel here and there. But being well drained and on the southerly side, it is warm and dry when other spots in the vicinity are dank and cold. Kiddy noted all this with his shrewd, calculative gaze, and then followed Matt to the very highest point of the great shelf of rock they were on.

"Ye couldn't find no cave round here, could ye?" demanded the mountaineer, leering at his companion.

"Have you been here this year?" asked the other, after an extended search.

"Sure," rejoined Matt, evidently enjoying Kiddy's inability to locate the retreat. "Been livin' here since I left jail—'bout six days."

"Point me the tree and I'll soon find it."

"Ye want to be told," laughed Matt, lifting a flat stone and drawing forth a coil of rope. "Ye couldn't, 'cause I didn't go to barkin' the pine for nothin', when I could jest as well let myself down. Ain't that right?"

"Right as a button," commended Kiddy, examining the rope. "I'm glad you've got this, Matt. Since mine was burnt, I've felt like a duck out o' water. How far is the hole in the rocks from the top?"

"Forty feet anyhow, and 'bout the same from there to the next step below."

"It looks it," observed the Westerner, peering over the precipice. "If those kids was out in the brook, they'd spot us," he continued, cautiously.

"Then we'd best hurry. Ye'll watch me from the top, and slide down when I'm off. I'll be a-waitin' ye at the front door," grinned Matt.

They approached a little grove of saplings a short distance below, and then Kiddy saw the tree the quarryman had mentioned by the roadside: a noble pitch-pine, straight as an arrow, its green plume almost brushing the top of the ledge where the men stood.

"That's the tree," explained Matt. "Ye can see a limb pointin' agin the block. It runs to the only door I know, though I guess the cats gets into the cave from the holes in the rocks."

"I can't see no hole," said Kiddy, dropping on all fours and studying the vertical wall of rock. "If that tree was five feet nearer, you could step into it from here."

"Yes, it's a leetle too fur to catch holt of. If ye

keep a-lookin', now, ye can see where the door goes in."

Matt, having taken a turn round a convenient sapling and dropped the rope-ends off, gradually let himself down, Kiddy eying the proceedings narrowly. When he had descended hand under hand for probably forty feet, Kiddy saw him begin to strike in with his feet, finally swinging from sight just where a heavy limb touched the wall.

"Be you comin'?" called the jail-bird.

"Comin' now," and Kiddy lowered himself with less effort than his predecessor.

"Pull the rope in," suggested Matt, as Kiddy joined him. "I got a pheasant this mornin', so we can have a bite. Be ye starvin'?"

"I've felt more fuller," replied Kiddy, letting go one end and drawing the rope into the niche with the other. "Where's the room?"

"This way," said Matt, crawling from sight at the end of the cavity.

Kiddy followed without a moment's hesitation, and the rascals presently found themselves in a "kind of nat'ral room in the rocks," as Matt had said. It was just as dry and cosey as one could have wished it, and sufficient daylight sifted in through a great oblique cleft to keep the interior rather lighter than the average cellar. The floor was one solid bed of stone

twelve or thirteen feet square, as indeed was the roof, though just how the latter kept from caving was a mystery which Kiddy was not inclined to solve. Judging from the appearance of things, he thought, it had held its place for many years, and was likely to do so in future. He next turned his attention to the walls, which were firm and solid on two sides, but seamed and studded with cracks and ragged holes as black as ink upon the other two.

"That's where the cats get in," said Kiddy, more irritably than the occasion seemed to demand. "Why didn't you plug them up?"

"Didn't like to shuffle the rocks," said Matt, with a significant shrug, as he whittled some kindlings and began to pick the grouse he had snared that morning.

"Where do you get water?"

"I let the pail down to a spring from what I call the windy, there," and he pointed to where a beam of sunlight glimmered on the wall. No wonder that Kiddy was completely won.

"It's a grand place, Matt," he said, removing his waistcoat and throwing himself down upon the comfortable bed of fir boughs and dried leaves. "How on earth did you tumble to it?"

"Well," said Matt, casting nervously about at the dark fissures as if to make sure that no one was listening there, "two year ago I was standin' on Spoke

Timber, waitin' for Tim's dogs to drive the deer to me—the same dogs as was killed up at the lake last fall. I seen a cat come jumpin' along on the ledge below, clumb the pine, and whip in here. I marked the spot, and bein' along troutin' next spring, clumb the tree myself and come in kind o' slow. You wouldn't 'a' believed it, the sight o' bones was here right on to this floor—mostly all deer, too. It kind of sobered me, Kidder, and I pitched 'em all down the cut there."

"It's good you did," said Kiddy, feeling for his weapon. "Ain't nothin' bothered since?"

"Only once. Afore I fell foul o' Davy Anderson, as I told ye, I come here one night afore startin' for to rob him. I come in without a light, and put out a couple of cats that looked the size o' that," and Matt indicated a point on the wall three feet above the floor.

"Don't make any smoke," cautioned Kiddy, as the top-hand lit the kindlings and arranged the grouse upon a forked stick. "It'll make folks nosey, to see a mountain smokin' like a steam engine."

"Nobody'll be along but what's fishin', and they won't be watchin' the ledges, I take it."

"It's good to be keerful," continued Kiddy, seriously. "We've both missed fire with the right barrel, Matt, and now we've got to hold close with the left. Hey?" and he prodded the rustic familiarly.

"Ye beat the likes of me," responded Matt, whose many good resolutions made in prison had melted very quickly under McCaffrey's genial arguments. "I'm with ye to the end, Kidder."

"There's no hurry," whispered the ex-ranchero, reflectively. "There'll be time enough to talk things up before we make a move."

Then they fell to discussing the partridge, and conversation did not flourish.



CHAPTER XIV

AT HAWK'S NEST RAVINE

THINGS were lively at the lake all the following week. The weather continued fine, and as the canoes and Harry's St. Lawrence skiff arrived Saturday, fishing and exploring parties were a common occurrence. There was a great deal of planning and visiting, too, and though Jack and Eugene seemed to take a lively interest in the fun, it was evident to at least two of the island boys that the first day's fishing at Glen Gorge had in some mysterious manner completely unsettled Jack's peace of mind; and though they often discussed it in private,



could not arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. So they decided to wait, and watch developments.

The racing shells, carefully boxed, were drawn up from the Eddy Tuesday morning, and by two o'clock had been floated. Grant generously offered the rival camp first choice, but this Harry would not have. They finally tossed, and Deer Lodge won, Eugene choosing. Then Perry chose one, and Harry another, Grant taking the fourth. But there was really very little difference between them, all being of several thicknesses of heavy paper well varnished, of one length and weight, and fitted with the usual overhanging locks and sliding seats.

"I'd want to be handy to land if ever I strapped me toes agin that flag-staff," said Jerry, as Billy Clarkson entered Grant's boat at the jetty.

"Yes," agreed Tim, stroking his dark beard thoughtfully, "I'd want to get off in some quiet cove and have a regular hoedown all by meself. If I was drowned, divil a word of pity I'd want for tyin' meself to a telegraph pole like that."

"It rows hard," smiled Billy, slowly drawing the bright cedar blades through the glassy surface and feathering lightly on the return. "Get in the other, Deane, and I'll give you a chase."

But Deane, not being dressed for the occasion, politely declined.

"I'll give you a race," volunteered Jerry, whipping off his coat and entering his trusty canoe. "I'll beat you round the island."

"It's a go," shouted Billy, resting on his oars till Jerry was abreast. "Now don't crowd me on the turns."

"You'll not be near enough," answered Jerry, dipping his paddle dexterously.

"Go!" cried the fellows, when the bows looked even, at which Billy sent the delicate shell out into the lead with a single stroke.

"Give it to him, Jerry!" called Grant, as the boys ran up the steps to Crown Point. "Don't loaf, or he'll beat you!"

But Jerry was not loafing. His pipe dropped from his mouth at once, and he clinched the paddle desperately.

"By cracky, he will that," he muttered, as open water showed between the boats. "I'm up agin it, and no mistake."

Billy shortened his stroke as soon as he had secured a fair lead, and tantalized the trapper with his sweetest smile. The latter drove the canoe after with commendable speed, but the sharp stern of the shell was always well in front. At the turns Jerry was not near enough to do any crowding, even had he so desired. When they entered the straight channel on

the west side, Billy spurted for a hundred yards, and it was surprising how far he left the doughty huntsman behind.

"I reckon I ain't in your class, sonny," confessed the latter, paddling laboriously to the jetty, where Billy stood waiting. "I wouldn't 'a' thought you'd have nipped me so high up."

"It's the most wonderful craft that ever I see," added the quarryman. "Gits through the water like a monstrous pickerel after a shiner."

"There's a show for you, Billy," said George, pointing to the shore camp. The boys looked in the direction indicated, and saw Harry come down from the boat-house, scull in hand, and glance inquiringly at the group on the beach. He wore a sleeveless shirt of light brown, crossed with horizontal pin stripes of light blue: short trousers of blue, with a garter of brown just below the knee—a very pretty combination. The letters G C were neatly embroidered on the shirt front.

"They've got their suits," said Donald, as Harry stepped into the shell, which his brother pushed off. "Harry's been training systematically since he accepted our challenge, and looks in good shape."

"I wish Perry could give him a 'brush,'" continued Deane. "We'd have some fun."

"Not yet awhile," laughed Perry, who was still

nursing his burns. "I'll be lucky to start training in ten days. But Harry's in fine fettle."

This seemed to be the general verdict. Though the Deer Lodger's stroke was a trifle short, he showed surprising form considering the little rowing he had ever done, and swung off down the lake without a splash or a falter.

"I don't want any of that in mine," said Billy, who had grown cautious since the jack-knife venture.

"Nor I," Grant added. "Wonder where Eugene is? I heard some fellows saying at school that he was one of the best oarsmen in the Albany Boat Club."

"I've heard the same," returned George.

"But you'll not see him do his best till the race," said Deane, who had had great respect for Eugene's courage since a certain foot-race on Andover Hill during the spring track athletic games.

"Still water runs deep," murmured Billy.

"Here comes Harry back," said George, who had not taken his eyes from the shell. "If he comes near enough, ask him about Eugene."

Harry presently came up, passing within easy hailing distance of the beach. Donald prodded Grant impatiently.

"That's great work for a starter," called Grant, as the shell proceeded very slowly.

"I'm surprising myself," Harry declared. "This boat just slips along of itself."

"They're great," agreed Billy. "You got them too cheap."

"Not *too* cheap," disagreed Grant, for expenses were beginning to count heavily. "Why doesn't Eugene try the other boat?" he asked, much louder.

Harry was rather inclined to be communicative. He felt that he looked very well in his new duds, and had created a favorable impression with the sculls. He could therefore afford to tarry a moment, and backed water accordingly.

"Oh, Gene is off trying to shoot a hawk in Hawk's Nest. Jack went with him to fish. Gene thinks a hawk from Hawk's Nest would look well mounted and hung over the camp door, besides being more romantic." He smiled indulgently. "I told him to stay home and begin training."

"There's little in a name; another hawk would look the same," suggested Don, glancing meaningfully at George. "Besides, hawks are unlucky." Lightly as the words were spoken, the boys remembered them long afterward.

"Jack's got a notion, too," continued Harry. "He says he saw a face in the rocks yesterday — declared he did, positively, and thinks the gorge is haunted."

"It's better fishin' than I thunk for," drawled Jerry,

breaking a gap in the conversation. "Some of you-uns won't care to fluster the trouts now, and Jacko, how he'll feesh!"

Harry hadn't taken this view before, but now he did, and joined heartily in the good-natured laughter that followed. But George was not convinced.

"What kind of a face, Harry?"

"You'll have to ask him," replied the Deer Lodger, sending the shell into mid-channel with a few deliberate strokes. "Come over and see us, fellows!"

"What did I tell you?" cried Don, as he led George in a ramble along shore. "Those fellows have got a bee in their caps, and we've got to watch them more closely. Jack took shiners with him this morning, because I saw him netting them last night. And Marshall took his new thirty-calibre rifle, for Jerry saw him when they left. Now answer me this: What would a soft-nosed bullet do to a hawk?"

"Not a single thing," said George, ironically.

"And what kind of trout take live bait?"

"Two-pounders, usually."

"And do you believe all this stuff and nonsense about 'a face in the rocks?'"

"Not a word. It's only Jack's hoax to keep us away. Jerry figured it very cleverly."

"That's what all the fellows think. I'd give my bottom dollar to know 'what's up.'"

"We'll follow them to-morrow. They wouldn't go to so much trouble for nothing, and there's no rule against our learning all we can."

"No," acceded Don.

"Well, we haven't missed anything yet, because Harry hasn't entered the size and weight of a single trout. You know he's supposed to inform Grant each time, and *vice versa*, so that any one can see the fish."

"But that doesn't account for Marshall's taking his rifle this morning. He wouldn't shoot anything at this season but a bear or a wild-cat, surely, and for either he'd want his rifle."

That night, however, Davy Anderson brought word from the Eddy that the cat-boats had arrived, and incidentally suggested that his father would need some extra help. Accordingly, both clubs filed down to the river the next day, where they beheld two shapely little boats, each fourteen feet long; they were painted white above the water line, green below. As Deane said, they were large enough for the lake, and could be handled more easily. Though protected by light frames, it was easy to see they were modelled on identical lines, and would very probably make fast sailers. The sticks, booms, and gaffs, with the canvas, blocks, and other paraphernalia, were lashed together in convenient form for conveyance. Both Thedford and Anderson had four

horses to their wagons, and though little time was lost in loading, it was late in the afternoon when the boats were launched, christened, and towed to their respective moorings. The Deer Lodgers elected to call theirs *Madge Wildfire*, while Grant suggested the *Islander* as a suitable name for the other boat. These words were lettered upon the sterns the following morning, when the masts were shipped and all else made taut.

But the surprise of the week came two days later, when Harry and Grant unpacked an oblong box that had arrived with some supplies the same afternoon. Beneath the mass of tissue paper the boys espied an envelope addressed in a girlish handwriting "To the Secretaries," and then caught sight of some folds of very glossy satin. Nearly all the Deer Lodge lads had been idling about the island since noon, but now a very interested group drew about Grant as he read the communication aloud.

"We hope we have not kept you waiting," wrote Harry's sister, Miss Virginia, "but as many of the girls have left town, Margaret and Elsie were the only ones to help me. Had it not been for their assistance, it would have been much longer in coming. Margaret suggested the monograms, and Elsie the shading of the large letters.

"Such a pleasant surprise this morning! General

Burton told us that he had made arrangements to come up for the boat-race, and Grant's mother has agreed to chaperon the party. Could anything be jollier? He says we may have to live in a tent, as he doubts your willingness to disturb yourselves in what he calls your 'training quarters.' But I thought he was severe."

Grant then drew out the flag, at sight of which the lads broke forth in a lusty cheer. It was five feet by three, the left rectangle being of blue, the right of white. In the upper left-



ELSIE

hand corner a dainty monogram had been cleverly worked in brown silk, and in the lower right-hand corner the initials S. I. C. had been skilfully interwoven in scarlet thread; while in the centre the large letters R. B. S. A., extending from the blue to the white satin, had been beautifully designed and embroidered, the first two in brown blending into deep crimson as they neared the white ground, finally terminating in scarlet.

"Let's have the first pigeon-shoot to-morrow," pro-

posed Billy, abruptly. He had secured a good bag of summer woodcock the day previous, without the aid of a dog, and, as he confided to Deane, felt "right."

"I'm willing," assented Paul, who, with Arthur, had been selected to represent the brown and blue. "Where'll we hold it?"

"Over on your shore, where there's plenty of room," suggested Grant. "We can go over and plant the traps now."

"And we'll have Jerry for judge," added Walter. "He'll be sure to 'roast' Billy."

"Not me," responded the brawny mountaineer. "He's an uncommon good lad, and I'll chalk a saucer up ev'ry time he cracks 'em in bounds."

The shoot took place as planned, and proved a genuine surprise. Paul and Arthur were clearly "off" in their work, breaking but the modest number of thirty-one birds in fifty chances. Billy and George, on the other hand, covered themselves with glory, killing twenty-three and eighteen respectively.

"I never see it bested since Chesterfield left," commented Jerry, with more enthusiasm than he had shown since his belated trip around the isle. And then he concluded dryly, "I reckon the rag flies yonder for the time being."

"Here it is," said Harry, grandly, as he handed

Grant the coveted prize. "Please accept our sincere congratulations."

"Thank you," said Grant, bowing stiffly in an effort to preserve his dignity. "Shall we arrange for the completion of the event?"

"Oh, not at present," replied Harry, evidently acting under instructions from his club. "We can do so later on just as well."

Within a very few moments the island boys, accompanied by Jerry, piled into their canoes and took up the paddles. They endeavored to proceed slowly, but I fear their strokes were nimble. The banner was presently hoisted on Crown Point, and three ringing shouts were given for Billy and George as a matter of course. Almost at the same time a light breeze tossed and fluttered the handsome ensign until it waved triumphantly from its place at the gaff-end. Although it was but a partial victory, the boys felt very jubilant, celebrating the occasion with a little banquet in which Billy's woodcock played a prominent part—for a time. About two o'clock the party emerged from the cabin in that contented frame of mind in which a good meal invariably leaves young America, and, I might also say, man in general.

George noticed a skiff far down the east shore, and spoke in an undertone to Don. Nothing more was said, but the boys shortly entered a boat and

headed for the mainland, above the rival camp. Reaching the shore unobserved, they drew the canoe upon the beach and started briskly through the woods, keeping well into Red Ridge, and making in a southerly direction for the outlet.

Nearly two hours later Eugene and his crony approached lower Glen Gorge by way of the ledges, and sat for some time watching the log upon which the king had crossed a week before. - They were in no very good frame of mind, for since the raising of the banner across the channel, the redoubtable Deer Lodgers had been "read the law" in Harry's most persuasive tone. Had the affable secretary realized how much his club was to lose through those idle words delivered from the shell Tuesday, he would most certainly not have uttered them. But then, as he afterward said, had Jack or Eugene given him an inkling of the truth in regard to the situation at Glen Gorge Run, instead of that "razzledazzle" about the hawk, he would have been absolutely non-committal in his replies. Deception never pays.

"There's no use waiting here any longer," grumbled Jack, who had lost all hope of ever seeing the panther again. "Let's go down to the pool."

"I'm willing," assented Eugene, promptly. "If we see that trout again to-day, I'm going to snare it."

"It's against the by-laws."

"Aw, I don't care. He's been hooked twice, and won't bite again."

"That's so. But the snare will leave an ugly mark."

"Then we can put him in our bait-box till the end of the summer; the scar'll be old by that time, and we can say we just caught the fish, and that the line was there," proposed Eugene, craftily. "What's the use of trying to act 'on the square' when everything goes against you?"

"*You* have nothing to worry over," said Jack. "The boys say you'll about win the boat-race, which means the gold vase and a lot of glory besides. I've had two good chances, and have missed them both. I'm not likely to get another, unless we get the cat-boat to handle, Gene," lamented the unhappy lad. "Didn't Clarkson have a great eye this morning?"

"Great luck! He can't beat Art again. I say, Jack, where did you see the face?"

"Up in that ledge, in one of those crevices. I can't say which one, but I saw it, I'm sure."

"Maybe it was some animal."

"Oh, now, give me credit for a little sense. It was a man's face, I tell you."

"Well, I'd like to see it," responded Gene, incredulously. "Call me if it pops in sight again."

But nothing more was seen of the mysterious countenance, the boys continuing slowly down the brook, wholly unaware that George and Don were furtively watching them from the rear.

When they reached the pool, Jack jointed his rod at once, while his companion took an empty can, and going to a large bait-box that had been partly submerged in a little spring near by, threw back the cover, and with the aid of a small hand-net, captured several little shiners, which he transferred to his tin receptacle. He then cut a twelve-foot birch pole and returned to the brook.

"You'd better have a try with the bait first," he said, passing the can to his chum. "Cast very quietly, and if he doesn't bite, I may be able to see him afterward." He then proceeded to braid some fine copper wire into a delicate noose, which he fastened securely to the pole.

Donald and George were by this time flat upon the nearest ledge-top, intently watching all that was taking place below. The significance of these unusual preparations did not escape either.

"There's a big fish keeps in that pool," whispered Don, peering intently between two stones.

"Yes, and Marshall's going to snare it," replied George, cautiously. "This doesn't surprise me."

"Nor me, neither. I'll bet it's as wild as a hawk by this time. They've been down here almost regularly for a week."

"Jack can't do anything. He's taken off the bait, and is trying a fly."

"Eugene is looking under the falls. There! Jack's handing him the snare. Let's go down and give them a piece of our mind."

"Don't you budge. It may be a pickerel."

"Doesn't matter. It's an unsportsmanlike proceeding."

George pinched the other hard.

"If they don't get it, we can have a try before long. If they snare it, it won't count."

This silenced Southgate, and there was a dead hush as Eugene slowly lowered the birch. After several seconds, that seemed to all concerned more like hours, Eugene jerked the pole upward with great celerity. It came out with the wire loop perceptibly lessened, but no lusty trout dangled from the end. Then the boys on the ledge-top heard a string of passionate words plentifully sprinkled with mild oaths, and saw Eugene dance about the mossy bank in a fit of anger, gesticulating wildly.

"Biggest trout I ever saw!" he vociferated, throwing up his hands two feet apart. "It was off the bottom — couldn't see how far — in sinking the

snare, touched him. It's all up, Jack!" and he lashed the babbling brook unmercifully.

"He failed to connect," whispered George.

"Let's go," said Don.

"Keep quiet. They'll be gone before long."

But it was late in the day before either party reached camp. Jack and Eugene paddled back in high dudgeon, while the eavesdroppers were proportionately delighted. They said little that night, and as it rained hard the succeeding day, the trip to Hawk's Nest was postponed. Saturday morning at four o'clock, however, a canoe left the island jetty and proceeded silently through the gray dawn. The ravine was reached in due season, where a hasty breakfast was eaten and the rods jointed. The boys had brought shiners with them, but they evidently had no attraction for that particular fish; neither did a choice assortment of flies. So Don proposed that they fish on down to Mink Brook. This was done, and fortune favored them on the way, though no very large fish were taken.

"Let's go along back and look under the falls," suggested George, whose mind had been occupied with thoughts of the "big trout."

Don glanced up, the question in his eyes.

"No, I wouldn't snare him if I had the chance," said George, with fine spirit. "But

I'd like to see a big fellow like that. Wouldn't you?"

"Of course I would," and they started back.

Arriving at the pool, they stood for some time in silence, watching the swirling water. A lark was loud overhead, while in an adjacent thicket a noisy company of blue jays was having a spirited argument with a saucy wren. Crickets chirped merrily in the luxuriant turf, and grasshoppers went sailing through the air on all sides. One of these adventuresome fellows thought to clear the rhododendron bushes on the left bank, but was evidently navigating without a compass; for he landed in the very centre of the pool, and after much difficulty crawled out upon a friendly leaf, which continued to float along in the strong current. The orthopterous insect did not seem to relish this mode of travelling, or else feared the passage of the lower falls, for as the leaf passed rapidly along, he endeavored to employ his well-known jumping powers in an effort to reach *terra firma*. But owing to the swift motion of the water, the leaf rode in a very heavy sea, offering the most capricious footing possible. It was not surprising, then, that the insect should fall short in its reckoning and land in mid-stream, with wings outspread. Before it had been carried three inches, there was a great plunge and a flash of green and pink and delicate

orange, followed by a second plunge and a few bubbles.

"Did you see that?" demanded George, quickly. "Isn't he a dandy?"

"Yes, sir, a perfect beauty!"

"Get me a grasshopper," continued George, nearly breathless with excitement, "as large as you can find."

They dropped their rods and began the chase at once. Don presently put up a big fellow, one of those dusty-brown chaps given to taking wing. He clapped his sombrero over a bunch of grass in which he had seen it alight, and after a very cautious search, brought it forth and returned. George came in soon after with a couple of small green ones, but it was decided to use Don's capture at once. It was accordingly put to death, and a large maple leaf procured. George next directed Don, who drew out about twenty feet of line, and fastening a temporary weight to the end, tossed it upon the right bank, clear of the fallen birch. While George took up his position at the head of the pool, Don went round to the line. He removed the leader, for gut is more difficult to manage than silk, and fastened to the delicate line a number one hook snelled on double gut of mist color. Acting upon his comrade's suggestion, he moistened the upper side of the leaf,

hooked the insect carefully through the body, and spread the black and yellow wings, which, when placed against the leaf, adhered to the moist surface. George knelt down behind the log, drew out more line, and motioned Don to cast off.

The frail little sailor gradually swung into the current as the weight of the silk began to tell, and then went tossing over the sunlit ripples on its little voyage to the lower water, George letting out line as required. It is quite safe to say that no cargo ever left a vessel more abruptly. When it had got pretty well on toward the end of the pool, George suddenly drew the rod up with a nervous twitch. The insect was jerked clear of the leaf in a twinkling, falling back upon the bosom of the pool as naturally as though dropped from the fair sky above. In the fraction of a second there was a heaving of the dark water, a streak of green and a splash. Then the reel sang like a top.

"Oh, George! hold fast to him!" cried Don, rushing up and down stream like one bereft of his senses. "Keep the slack in, and he's ours, sure! Hooray!"

But the excited angler did not seem to hear. He allowed the line to run out for an instant after the vicious strike before he hooked cleverly. The reel screeched again, and the bamboo rod bent double, the tip being but a few feet before the boy's pale

face, while the butt was pointed back over his shoulder. As yet neither lad had had a fair view of the lusty denizen, but presently, as George continued to thwart the monster's lightning-like rushes by a skilful, steady play of the trusty rod, the beautiful iridescent mass leaped clear of the pool, and with a great quiver shook glittering drops of water from its gleaming sides. Never did *fontinalis* fight more desperately, more doggedly. For the first twenty minutes it continued to battle in the lower water, which made it easier for George, as forty odd feet of line were out, and the strain upon the bamboo, while at times great, was not so sudden that he could not anticipate it. Evidently finding it useless to attempt leaving the pool as it had done with Eugene, the fish started straight for the upper falls with incredible speed. Don shouted a warning as George began to spin the multiplying reel furiously, muttering as he did so, "Now for it! Steady, boy, steady!"

The lads could distinctly see and hear the line cleaving the water, but felt rather than saw the dark object beneath. And here George executed a fine bit of angling. Seeing that the fish was obviously intending to clear the falls, and realizing he would be unable to keep his line from fouling against the log, and probably wrecking his pole, he extended the rod down stream, elevating the tip about five feet from

the surface of the brook. During these few brief seconds the line was of course slack, the angler improving the opportunity to complete the reeling in.

The trout swept up the pool like a cannon-shot, but just as the line reached the outer border of spume, George whipped the rod off to the right most adroitly, keeping his thumb upon the reel-handle in order to prevent the line from giving. This saved the day. The fish felt the full spring of the rod just as it was clearing the foam, and although its momentum was great, the counter force was sufficient to veer the lusty champion and tumble it back into the froth, beaten but defiant still. Then followed a series of gallant plunges at close quarters, but all to no purpose. The boy's marvellous skill and commendable patience eventually prevailed; for after a long deep-water sulking and a final spirited lashing of its broad tail, a sort of farewell ceremony to the haunts it had known so long and loved so well, the superb fish was drawn up to the bank, where Don was eagerly awaiting it. He took a firm hold, running his thumb under the gill, and lifted it clear of the pool, from which he instinctively retreated to a place of safety. Disgorging the hook, he placed the catch upon the turf, where it flopped tenaciously.

"Don't kill it," said George, with an odd feeling of triumph blended with regret. "Don't kill it, Don."

"What'll we do, then?"

"Here, put it in Jack's bait-box."

They ran to the little spring, and threw back the cover. There seemed about eight inches of water in the box, which was nearly a yard long—an old soap-box. Don reluctantly slid the fish in and quickly closed the lid. They could hear it striking the sides sharply for several moments after, and concluded it would survive the battle.

"What are you going to do now?" Don wanted to know.

"Let's find a little spring-hole and wall it up. We can keep him alive for a day or two, and perhaps carry him to the island alive."

Don shook his head doubtfully, but consented to assist his chum. They went up to the wellspring, where, after some little labor, they succeeded in walling off a satisfactory basin from which the trout could not escape. The transfer was next made, and the fish seemed more contented on the natural bottom.

Though the boys were eager for their dinner, it was some two hours before noon. They decided to return without delay, and were soon on their way. Highly elated, they kept speculating on the probable size and weight of the catch with boyish extravagance, and before long were surprised to find themselves skirting Panther Ledge where it crowds upon

the gorge with a grudging air. Here the uncanny sound of a human voice, coming from the great serrated ledges on the right, suddenly brought them to a full stop.

Donald broke the abrupt silence.

"I saw the face, George," he whispered hoarsely, "the face in the rocks. It's gone now."

"Where?" demanded George, backing up. "Tell me, but don't point."

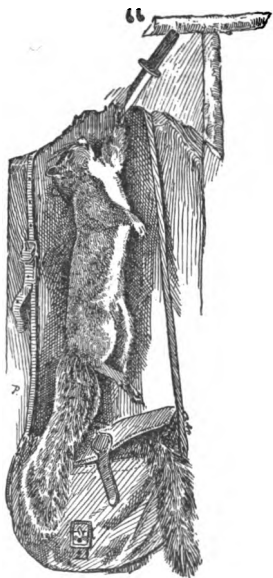
"In the niche by that high pine," answered the former, speaking more readily. "This place isn't haunted, but there's a man hiding in those ledges, I'm certain."



WOODCOCK

CHAPTER XV

GLEN GORGE



"HEM boys has gone back, Kiddy."

"Well, keep your head in, Matt, and stop actin' like a weasel in a wall."

"They'll not see me," boasted Matt, confidently. "What'll take 'em to Hawk's Nest so reg'lar?"

"Don't know."

"Fishin' is good below the ravine, but them shore boys don't go only halfway down."

"I don't care where they go," answered Kiddy, from his bed of boughs. "When our man drops down this way, as I told you before, we can get 'hunk,'" continued the mendacious ingrate.

"We've got to have our ten thousand, Matt, an' no mistake."

"Won't another sonny do ye as well?"

"I was lookin' in the printed book I told you about, and I seen there was two Langdon lads in this here round-up," said McCaffrey. "I s'pose they must be brothers, but I don't *know*."

"Can't we learn for sartin?" asked the quarryman, anxious to begin operations at once. "I might speak 'em next week. It wouldn't be the foolishhest thing I ever done," and he looked very smart.

"It would be blamed near it," was the disparaging comment. "Next to watchin' that gorge like you were 'holdin' a bunch of steers, it would be the plumb foolishhest."

Matt's ambitious spirit drooped perceptibly. "Ye'll want a bird or two, won't ye, Kidder?" he humbly inquired, reaching for the rope.

"Sure," said Kiddy, brightening up. "If you fetch two, Matt, you can wear the diamond to-morrow."

Matt was off without another word, and spent the remainder of the day in "checking up" his snares. About sunset, on his way back, he chanced to notice the worn character of the turf about the pool where the lusty trout had been taken, and forthwith concluded that this hole must have been the object

of the boys' frequent pilgrimages. Tracking soon becomes a second nature to the average backwoodsman, and Matt had little difficulty in following the trampled grass to the bait-box, and from there to the little basin above, where any lingering doubts on the subject were instantly dispelled.

"That's the all-firedest brute of a fish I ever see," he soliloquized, dropping upon all fours to get a better look at the variegated under coloring of the vanquished champion. "I'll soon whack him a dandy," and he proceeded to look for a convenient stone. "Ain't it scand'lous, how them boys comes up from the city an' ketch out all our big fish! It ought to be forbidden."

Matt raised the stone and took careful aim. He was on the east bank, so that his shadow did not fall across the water, and the trout did not take fright. It remained quite motionless, save for the regular movement of the gills, fins, and tail.

"I'll bet it's nigh twenty inches long," murmured Matt, lowering the missile. "I dunno should I kill it."

After a moment's pondering, he dropped the stone and hurried through the ravine to the cave, where he found Kiddy getting in firewood for the night.

"What's the matter?" inquired the latter, as Matt tossed a brace of grouse on the ledge-top. "Been seen nosin' round?"

"Ye couldn't guess," replied the mountaineer, good-humoredly. "I seen the biggest trout that ever wore specks."

"Why didn't you ketch it for a Sunday fry?" demanded Kiddy, irascibly.

"It is ketched," retorted Matt, with a grim smile. "I dunno should I fetch it one with a lump of a rock."

"Did you think it was too good for us?" grumbled Kiddy.

"It ain't that," explained Matt. "Them city lads ketched it and put it into a spring hole. Mebbe they'd be glad to get it back," concluded the rogue, artfully.

"You ain't so slow, either," said Kiddy, producing the association by-laws, and eagerly scanning paragraph one of article six. "Where is it?"

"Halfway down the ravine."

"Let's go and get it."

"Take the pail," advised the sequacious Matt, highly elated over the importance of his discovery. "There's a box there, but it'll leak some, I shouldn't wonder, bein' full o' leetle holes."

As twilight was fast approaching, the men set off after lowering the firewood, and the half-mile to the pool was soon covered. Kiddy, after turning Jack's shiners into the spring, carried the box to the basin, where Matt stood ready with the pail.

"See it!" ejaculated the top-hand, eagerly. "Did you ever mind the beat of it, Kidder?"

"I never did," responded the Westerner, promptly. "Clap it into that pail, till we get a chance to look it over."

But even in the small basin Matt had considerable difficulty in cornering the prize. He finally did work it against the grass, and, with his comrade's aid, turned it into the pail. Matt lifted it by the gill, and held it aloft in the last rays of the setting sun, a picture beautiful to behold.

"It's fallen foul of a paint store," was Kiddy's way of expressing it. "It'll go four pounds, Matt."

"Mebbe so. Be you goin' to hook the box, too?"

"Sure thing. We'll take 'em both up to the cave, seein' that we've 'propriated 'em," was the ready response.

They returned, and after some discussion the box was lowered from the cave to the spring, after which Kiddy let himself down on the rope. When he had planted the box to his liking, Matt lowered the fish in the pail, which had been fitted with a temporary cover to prevent the trout's leaping out. By the time Kiddy had transferred it to the box, the fish was pretty well exhausted, and reeled giddily upon its side; but, after a few brisk dashes in the icy water of the little spring, quickly revived, and, resigning itself to the inevitable,

took up its position in the form of a crescent along the bottom of the box, where it was destined to remain for eight long weeks.

"There'll be plenty of fun when the youngsters come down again," laughed Kiddy, as he rejoined his crony in the cave. "We'll have to keep our peepers peeled and see the sport." But neither quite expected the theft would lead to the extraordinary events of Monday.

Early that morning, George and Don, having grown anxious over their captive, decided to hurry down to Hawk's Nest with a large pail, in which they proposed to carry the fish to the island. They had half decided to keep it alive in the sand spring by their camp, and had meant to surprise their comrades on returning. They had, therefore, not gone into detail concerning their good luck, merely having said to Grant that they expected to enter a trout that day. The many gleaming pools along the run delayed them somewhat, but about eight o'clock they neared middle Hawk's Nest in high spirits, hurriedly crossed the brook with a great splashing, and trotted over the turf to the rivulet. Here they were inexpressibly startled, for almost the first thing Don noticed was the fact that the bait-box was missing. "Oh!" he exclaimed, glancing up and down the streamlet in a dazed manner. "That's queer."

"That is queer," agreed George, who for a moment had been struck speechless. "That's the very spot."

The boys stood there quite motionless, until the sensation of approaching disaster grew unbearable. Then Don led the sprint to the basin. George feared to look, but turned his gaze to his chum's flushed and excited countenance. There he read the brief story; for there was a quick fading of color from Don's cheeks, and a flash of righteous indignation from the handsome eyes.

"Gone!" Don muttered hoarsely, like a death-knell, and began studying the few faint footprints.

"Yes, it's gone," came the melancholy reverberation, at which the speaker drew his brows together in a troubled frown, and took a look as if to satisfy himself.

"It never got out."

"Never."

"You think it was —"

"It must have been they."

"These are Eugene's footprints," continued Don, excitedly. "See how small they are."

"But these can't be Jack's — too large."

"He's pretty stout, and wears a big shoe."

"That's so;" and George went over to the spring, where he raked up a handful of pebbles, which slowly sifted through his fingers back to the water.

He repeated this performance time and again without looking up.

"Well, what are we going to do about it?" demanded Don, who felt that matters must sooner or later come to a head. "Shall we bring it before the clubs?"

"Not until we know for sure," George replied, slowly rising to his feet. "Some quarrymen might have been fishing here yesterday."

"But they couldn't have found this box, hidden in this little spring. Besides, these marks in the sand are two days old."

"They look so, but you can't always tell," murmured George, dejectedly.

"Let's go back and have it out. You take the brook, and I'll take the ledges. If either meets them, give the whistle."

"It's a go," said George, as they started off. "We'll meet at the boat."

But nothing was seen of either Jack or Eugene at Hawk's Nest, for the simple reason that they had run the Brink Brook rapids with their canoe that morning, and had fished up the ravine to the pool, arriving soon after the islanders' departure. Jack was quick to discover the loss of his beloved bait-box, while Eugene, whose turn it was to fish the pool, was furious over the loss of the shiners. Without a

word they dropped their rods and took Donald's track leading to the ledges, he having left a fresh trail in the rich dark earth, still moist with dew. It was not so easy to follow it along the rocks, but as it led pretty generally in the direction of the gorge, Eugene did not pause an instant. At the foot of Panther Ledge the pursuers caught sight of Don's sombrero, and silently pressing on at redoubled speed, soon got within hailing distance.

"Hey, you, Southgate!"

Donald wheeled at the sound of Eugene's impatient cry, for a hard run on a hot morning does not improve one's temper, and stood expectantly awaiting the Deer Lodgers. He was naturally very much surprised and rather flurried on finding the pursued pursuing him, and neglected to signal for his chum. In fact, he did not think of George, for Eugene, panting and wrathful, was upon him at once.

"It's a wonder you wouldn't mind your own business," he began, with an angry clinching of his hard fists.

"Please explain yourself," replied Donald, slowly, and with the chill on. "This is an unexpected pleasure, I'm sure. I was looking for you myself."

"Huh!" Jack put in. "It's a queer way you have of doing it—digging out when you hear us coming."

"Nobody's been doing any digging, unless it's

you," retorted Southgate, for Eugene had nearly run Jack off his legs. "You look as if you'd dug through Button Rock."

Jack advanced threateningly, but Donald held his ground stoutly.

"Hands off!" cried Eugene, still glaring defiantly at the island boy. "Man for man, Jack; I'm looking after this chap."

"You seem to be," smiled Don. "Now air your grievances and give me a chance."

"Come off the roost," urged Jack, tauntingly, at the same time edging unnecessarily close to Don as if to incite him to a more bellicose attitude. "Why didn't you get fishing-grounds of your own, to begin with?"

"Yes," continued Eugene, sharply, "that's the first point. We'll give you the second later on; and the third, too," at which he opened and closed his fists as if he meant to tear things generally.

For a moment Donald was nonplussed. He felt pretty certain that his opponents were playing a part, but just what they meant to do and say was clearly beyond him. "It's some bluff to cover up their theft," he soliloquized; and then, turning his candid gray eyes upon Eugene, said aloud, "I must confess I'm in the dark. You'll have to enlighten me."

"It's no trouble to do that," snapped Eugene, fairly choking with passion. "You fished in our pool!"

"Yours?"

"Yes, you and George Langdon have been trying to get the best of us for a week back. You sounded Harry Martin about our private affairs, and you've got to fishing in our pool," stormed Eugene. "It's a mean, unsportsmanlike performance."

"Anything else?"

"Yes, confound it, everything else. Where's our bait-box?"

In a twinkling Donald told himself that Eugene had chosen this as the best way of concealing the theft of the big trout, and realized how helpless George and he would be should their rivals continue to accuse them before the other fellows in the same audacious manner. He smiled grimly at the thought, cleared his throat, and called loudly, "This way, George!" ending with a piercing whistle.

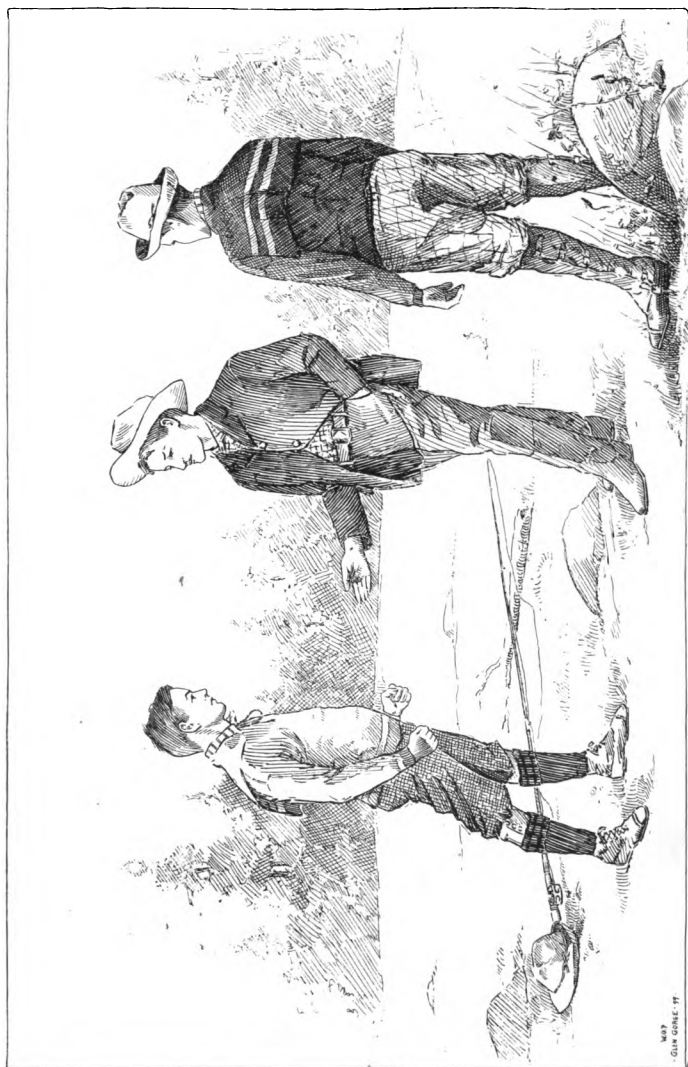
"You'll need some help," ventured Gene, at which Jack began rolling up the sleeves of his sweater.

"You have really managed this very well," continued Don, ignoring the last remark; "but it won't work."

"Do you mean to say you didn't take our bait-box?"

"I mean to say just that, and you know better."

"You know you stole it, you —" But Eugene did



"IT'S NO TROUBLE TO DO THAT," SNAPPED EUGENE. Page 220.

not finish. Before he could utter the final word, he had received what must be known to the sporting gentry as an "upper cut" squarely upon the point of his chin. It not only staggered him, it sent him reeling back over his hat, which he had tossed upon Don's pole on coming up. Still he could not regain his balance, and catching his heel against a small rock just beyond, fell sprawling to the ground. Donald watched him, evidently believing Jack would not attack under the circumstances. In this he was mistaken. Jack's blood rose rapidly as his club-mate fell, and almost before he knew it he had dealt Don a stinging blow across the left cheek.

"Let him be!" yelled Eugene, advancing with clinched fists, while the wide brown collar of his sweater rose above his shoulders like an angry grouse. He came up cautiously and squared off. At the same time the belligerents could hear George running along the shelf of rock above, calling lustily to encourage his comrade. He jumped to the level ground upon which the others stood, rushing in as Eugene led savagely with his right, straight for Don's nose, which was rather a prominent feature. Don parried the blow, and in return delivered a left-hander that sent Eugene staggering again — this time sideways to Southgate's right.

"Pitch in before he gets his breath," called Eugene,

as George halted at a little distance and was seen to be blowing hard. Jack rushed in, but George nimbly avoided his opponent's sluggish moves.

"You'd better snare him," suggested Don, as Eugene began sparring for an opening.

"You sneaks!" cried Gene, in a fit of anger. "Eavesdroppers! rogues!"

"That hurt," retorted Don, triumphantly. "Now will you be good?"

"You admit it?" demanded Eugene, contentiously.

"We may have seen you looking under the falls," said Donald, suavely.

Eugene ground his teeth in desperation. "At him, Jack!" he shouted, and advanced resolutely to the fray.

They parried and led and dodged and parried again, soundly taxing their rather limited knowledge of the gentle art of self-defence. Don tried another right-hander, but Eugene ducked, and, popping up under Don's arm, dealt his adversary a stunning blow on the mouth. He followed it up boldly, for he was no coward, and soon had Don on the defensive. This encouraged Jack, who squared off as George, having regained his breath, advanced with lowered fists.

"Keep away," cautioned Jack, whose heart was not in the fight. "I'll punch your head."

But George did not heed the advice. He led out himself, landing heavily on Jack's nose. Jack in turn struck George in the eye, which caused the latter to believe, for a moment, that night had suddenly descended, for stars of lambent purity were plainly visible in every quarter. Jack improved this opportunity to close, which he executed very cleverly. George struggled to throw him, but Trehearne made good use of his weight. They reeled about the turf, tripping upon the blackberry vines and stumbling over small rocks, but never once falling to the ground. At length they broke away, both quite exhausted, and stood some distance apart, scowling fiercely. Jack's nose was bleeding freely, while his antagonist's eye had already reached an unnatural size, besides being very red.

In the meantime, Donald and Gene were having a desperate encounter. Though very angry, each had sparred scientifically, and each had received a generous number of blows. Don's lips were badly swollen and bleeding slightly; his left cheek, where Jack had first struck him unawares, and his opponent after, was twice its usual size; and he felt his knuckles burn where they had clashed with Gene's during the set-to. Gene, on the other hand, was little better off. Though there were no telltale smears about his pale face, his chin ached painfully, for Don had directed

blow after blow at this feature, and few had fallen short. As a result, no blood was drawn upon his face, though unmistakable evidences of the conflict were there in irregular swellings of a light red color.

While George was nursing his eye, Jack glanced furtively at Eugene, and saw that both he and Don were evidently waiting for their second wind, for they stood well apart, with hands resting easily at their sides. Jack could hear them pant, saw the bosom of Eugene's sweater rise and fall against the distant treetops, and told himself that the fight was virtually over. Donald was the first to speak.

"Had enough?"

"Have you?" asked Eugene, defiantly. "You're whipped, and you know it."

"So is Langdon," halloed Jack. "He can't see to hit straight."

"They're beaten," insisted Eugene, elated over the fact that he had come out of the battle with a comparatively presentable visage. "Come on, Jack, let's go back." He picked up his hat without another word, and walked toward the gorge, Jack circling around George and following after.

When they were out of sight, George turned to his chum for an explanation.

"It was this way," began the latter. "They came running up from behind, and openly accused us of

stealing their bait-box. I could see it was all a bluff to shield their theft of the trout, but didn't say so outright—merely hinted at it. Marshall got altogether too obstreperous to suit me, and as I saw the matter would have to end in blows, thought I'd better get in the first one."

"That was right," commended George, his handkerchief to his eye. "What happened next?"

"Oh, Jack lost his head and punched me from the side. I suppose he didn't like to see Gene going down."

"So you floored him once?"

"Well, not exactly; he tripped over that rock and lost his balance. But I don't blame Jack for that; it was pretty exciting there for a few minutes."

During this conversation George had been struggling with his chum's solution of Gene's accusation, and before long was ready to agree with it.

"I see," said he, musingly; "they mean to put it all on to us so that nobody'll know who to believe."

"That's it."

"But we can identify the trout."

"Maybe so," Don answered dolefully; "but perhaps we'll never have the chance. If they do away with the fish, we'll all be on the same level again. There'll be no more three-pounders taken this summer."

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"I guess you're right," murmured George, reflectively. "It's too bad."

"It *is* too bad," agreed Don, too loyal to upbraid his comrade for leaving the trout at Hawk's Nest Saturday night. "Are you much hurt, old man?"

"Not much. I got a bad poke in the eye, but nothing else."

"Well, I don't feel any too chipper myself. Let's get out of this sun and talk it over."

They started for the ravine, where they spent the remainder of the morning in the cool shade, earnestly discussing a score of plans for recovering possession of the missing trout. George kept some moist leaves over his eye, while Don tried to check the swelling of his cheek with alternate applications of mud and cold water. But, despite everything, Don continued to take on the appearance of a person afflicted with the mumps, while George's eye bore every indication of assuming a new color on the morrow.

With the rival combatants things went very much the same, though they separated before long. Gene was anxious to get back to camp as rapidly as possible, where he hoped to enlist the sympathies, not only of his club-mates, but also the island quartet's. He steadily refused to bathe his face before Jack, and stoutly maintained that he never felt better in his life. Somebody, he said, would have to return to the big

brook and hide the canoe, but there was no need of two going. For once Jack responded eagerly. He felt that he had had rather the upper hand of the argument with George, and concluded also that Gene could manage things at the camps better without him. But when he was out of sight, Gene was seen to make for the stream at once, where he refreshed himself with a long drink and a liberal bathing of his face and hands. Selecting a seat beneath a hemlock, he dropped his chin in his palm as though there had been moments in his life when the lower portion of his face felt decidedly better.

For a while he idly watched a flicker flash about a grove of maples. He was conscious of the bird's flight, but his thoughts were far away, back at the lake rehearsing the events of the morning before an excited group. The more he thought of it, however, the less he liked the idea. He might be mistaken, after all, and somebody unknown might have appropriated the bait-box. Southgate had appeared very cool, certainly. But he had not long to wait for a solution of the mystery. He presently made out regular tapping upon bark, and told himself the flicker was at work. By degrees the tapping grew louder, and seemed to come nearer, from the rear. It finally ceased altogether, at which Eugene, whose curiosity was aroused, quickly turned his head, just in

time to catch sight of a huge foot stealthily drawn behind a tree-trunk. He bounded to his feet at once, for there is no surer way of alarming a schoolboy in the deep woodland than by his receiving the impression that a strange man is keeping from sight in the vicinity. He stood straight as an arrow behind the hemlock, and took off his hat. For a few moments there was a silence, which was finally broken by a continuance of the senseless tap-tap-tapping upon the brittle bark. Eugene did not stir, but called out loudly at a venture:—

“I guess you’ve found the wrong man, haven’t you?”

“Ain’t ye the sonny that fit like a cornered catamount?” was the prompt response.

“What’s it to you?”

“Oh, I reckon ye’d tell me what ’twas all about. Ye did hammer each other so like fury,” marvelled the stranger.

Eugene stuck his head around the tree; the man was decidedly interesting.

“Let’s get a look at you, old woodpecker,” he said, and advanced halfway in the open. The man did the same, grinning sheepishly as he shifted his weight from foot to foot. Almost at once Eugene noticed a fine brace of squirrels dangling from the hand and a remarkable gem in the stranger’s grayish shirt.

"What's your name?"

"Matt Flint."

"Where do you reside, Matt?"

"How's that?"

"Where do you live? where's your home?"

Matt shrugged and giggled, at the same time indicating Panther Ledge with a toss of his head. Eugene recoiled a step or two and scrutinized the bushwhacker.

"Aha! camping out," he said lightly, and watched Matt burnish the headlight as Kiddy had done. "That's a wonderful stone, Mr. Flint."

"Do ye like it?" and Matt felt pleased beyond expression. "It come clear from Afriky."

"It must have," said Eugene, dryly. "What did you say awhile ago?"

"I was sayin' ye fit hard," grinned Matt; "but rubber boots raked your chin some."

"Oh, I don't mind that," the boy answered airily. "Did you see the racket?"

"Did I see it! Well, now," and Matt looked as wise as possible. "But what's it all fer, I dunno?"

Eugene thought hard for moments together, then spoke abruptly, looking straight at the top-hand.

"Those fellows stole our bait-box, and we thrashed them for it."

Matt flushed—even his voice took on a guilty color.

"Ain't ye missed nothin' else?"

"No-o," replied Eugene, hesitatingly. "Did you find something?"

"Well, we did, now, but I reckon it don't belong to ye."

"It might," asserted Eugene, with a bland smile. "Of course I don't know what my chum's lost."

"No, I reckon ye ain't got no claim on this," said the uncommunicative Matt. "I believe the island lads lost it."

Eugene was nettled.

"Oh, you needn't be so mysterious," he replied superciliously. "I know who you are; you're the man my chum saw in the ledges last week."

"Ssh!" cautioned Matt; "not so loud, sonny." And after a little pause, "What if I be?"

"Nothing," answered Gene, sorry he had given vent to the words. "Let's hear what the island boys lost. I might take it off your hands."

"And agin ye mightn't," objected Matt.

"Of course I'd expect to pay for it."

"And pay big?"

"It depends upon what you've got. It can't be worth very much, I'm sure. What is it?" he asked impatiently.

"Only a trout about two foot long," replied the mountaineer, with an exasperating drawl.

Eugene started; he had expected anything but this.

"Where is it?" he demanded quickly. "I'll buy it of you."

"For how much?" asked Matt, artfully.

"Oh, say five dollars."

"It ain't near enough."

"Say ten, then. That'll buy you a suit of clothes."

But Matt was not so easily persuaded.

"I'll have to see my partner," he said, picking up the trays. "You wait here till I get back."

He was not gone long, for Kiddy had seen the encounter from Panther Ledge, and had directed Matt to approach Gene, and, if possible, ascertain what the "scrap" was about—he thought he knew.

"Ye didn't miss yer guess, Kidder," began Matt, as he neared his captain. "They was fightin' over the bait-box, but this sonny'll buy the fish for ten dollars."

"Ain't it his?"

"I don't think he ever heard tell on it."

"Ho, ho!" muttered Kiddy, thoughtfully. "Did he seem s'prised to see you?"

"He did that. But he said his chum seen me in the rocks last week."

"That's it!" snarled Kiddy, wrathfully. "I knew you'd get it put on to you! It won't matter much

now if we 'lay low' any more or not. Where's the lad?"

Matt pointed down the brook, and led the way. They found Eugene impatiently awaiting Matt's return, and though he seemed thoroughly surprised at the general get-up of the rustic's companion, it is very doubtful if at that time he connected McCaffrey with Perry's adventure on the Hudson. He must have comprehended it before long, but never alluded to the subject in any way.

Kiddy could see with half an eye that Eugene was keenly desirous of securing the trout, and accordingly exacted many things in payment. The boy finally consented, after hearing a clever description of the fish, which he had the best of reasons for not doubting, to pay the following: ten dollars in cash, some groceries, and a pair of shoes for Kiddy — russets preferred. He was to deliver the money and articles the following morning at the head of the Mink Brook rapids, and Kiddy agreed to have the trout on hand, dead or alive, he said, as Eugene desired. They were still beneath the hemlock, with Eugene pacing thoughtfully about.

"You say the fish is absolutely safe from discovery?" he repeated, for the third time.

Kiddy nodded again, and there was another gap in the talk.

"Well, I'll bring the things early to-morrow, but you keep the trout where it is, and feed it once a day — Matt'll know how. When I get ready for it, I'll say so. Now I'll not open my lips about this, and you mustn't, either — understand that?"

"We're not throwin' stones in a glass house," was Kiddy's significant reply.

They parted soon afterward, and Eugene sat down to think it all over, which occupied considerable time. Early in the afternoon he made his way over Red Ridge to the lake, where he found the rival camps in a high state of excitement over the events of the morning. Deane, Harry, Paul, and Grant were desirous of bringing about a reconciliation at once, but George and Jack were obdurate. Walter proposed leaving it to arbitration. Jerry was the only one who seemed to enjoy it, and he did enjoy it hugely.

"Why, durn it, ever since you-uns histed that flag so pretty like, them fellers has been struttin' around like leetle fightin' cocks what's swallowed a dose of 'hop-up.' I'd ruther lost a coal-black otter in February than missed it."

Later on he expressed his feelings more minutely in an invitation sent at Harry's request to his old friend, big Dicky Halden, the eldest of the Halden boys, all famous hunters in that region.

"dicky Halden," wrote Jerry in his characteristic way, "if your threw plantin an cultervatin I can tell you how to heve some fun befour deer shootin. theys a regular bustin up here at the lake cause too partes of skool lads is up tryin like sam Hill to ketch each other above the second jint. this mornin they had a run in an now go shyin by one another like a fox what likes the bate but smels the trap. they say youll hafte come up an stay with them cause if you dont you wont know what good lads they is. theyll treat you white as a swamp rabbit. your frend jerry Quick."

That night, when his club-mates were sound asleep, Eugene entered the little pantry surreptitiously and purloined a goodly supply of canned goods, which he slipped into a meal-bag he had ready for the purpose. He carried the bag out to the beach, where he stepped into his canvas canoe and noiselessly pushed off. He paddled away unobserved over the moonlit waters to the southward, until he neared the outlet. At daybreak he descended to the rapids, where he found Kiddy awaiting him. It was the first of a number of appointed meetings which took place at irregular intervals during the succeeding weeks, and which were the indirect cause of a thrilling incident at the Wildcat Hole two months later.

CHAPTER XVI

RIVALS ALL



THE summer gradually waned, and although everything was done to straighten out the little mystery of the missing bait-box and trout, in the hope of restoring that hearty good-fellowship so apparent during the first week at the lake, all efforts met with little success. The secretaries and their chosen advisers were either lacking in diplomacy or the ex-belligerents were unreasonably obstinate. Though Harry was a frequent visitor at the island camp, his calls became rather brief and ceremonious, for he had unconsciously taken on that "high and mighty" air assumed by Jack and his crony toward the island boys in general. Each club "took sides," as was expected, and frankly refused to believe the other's story. Interest in

angling continued unabated, however, a number of good-sized trout being entered by several of the lads during the succeeding weeks.

On three occasions both Don and George attempted to explain matters in detail and receive positive denials to their insinuations, but the crafty Eugene would not now be cornered. He kept his own counsel, but continued to purloin articles from the pantry and make mysterious trips down the lake. Nobody really suspected him but Jack, which was not strange, considering the fact that all the fellows supplied themselves generously before starting out on the various excursions that seemed to shorten the cool, bright days so perceptibly.

All through July Walter and Harry visited the swales with their shot-guns and setters, Von and Tan, owned by the former, and Hector and Gray Mark, the property of the latter. The dogs had been broken by their owners, and were certain to give Billy Clarkson's Spinaway and Gadfly a spirited argument. The islanders decided to show but the one pair, which, indeed, was all they could have properly entered, as Grant's brace had been purchased as thoroughly trained and broken. The month of August was closed to woodcock shooting, which gave the dogs a rest till the ruffled grouse season opened in September.

The second clay-pigeon match, held the last week in July, was hotly contested, and was finally won by Arthur and Paul, the former placing the astonishing number of twenty-four birds to his credit out of the possible twenty-five, Billy being second with twenty-two. Paul and George scored nineteen each. The third and final match took place two days later, and I am sorry to say that Billy became badly "rattled" on this occasion, breaking but a baker's dozen birds. George did far better, with twenty-one, but again Arthur proved the winner, thereby becoming the lucky medallist, scoring twenty-three against Paul's twenty-two; close work, truly, and hugely enjoyed by the spectators, many of whom had come up from the Eddy for the occasion. Grant was not greatly disappointed, for he hoped that the raising of the banner after their victory would in a fair measure restore the Deer Lodgers' good nature. But it seemed that the rivalry only waxed warmer.

For some time the crews of the cat-boats had expressed themselves as ready to race. Billy and Deane were to manage the *Islander*, while Eugene and Jack had been given charge of the *Madge Wild-fire*. Deane and Jack respectively were in command. Owing to the generally calm surface of the lake, it was of course impossible to arrange for the events much before the hour of sailing. Two courses,

however, had been determined on, and had been marked with gay buoys; the first following the west shore pretty exactly from Red Brook to the Bald Hill ledges, at the southwest corner of the lake; the second starting at the outlet and ending in the channel by Squirrel Island, the finish to be an imaginary line stretching between Crown Point and the shore camp.

An ominous rumbling of thunder awoke Grant and Jerry one dismal morning in early August. Looking out of the windows, they could see that an east wind was responsible for the restless condition of the lake. The whitecaps were plainly visible toward the outlet, and seemed to be creeping further in. Already little breakers were sounding on the nearby shores, rushing crisply over the pebbly beaches or bursting into saucy plumes of spray against the blue-gray boulders. To the eastward the upper line of Red Ridge was scarcely discernible against the sullen sky beyond.

"Ahoy, there, Captain Cumnor!" cried Grant, looking down at the pennant fluttering from the *Islander's* masthead. "Plenty of dust on the lake to-day. Come, out with you, sleepyhead!"

"You'd better face that gale with bare sticks," said Perry, hastily throwing some chips into the stove, for the morning was damp and chilly.

"That's nothing," replied Deane, for he had great faith in his little boat. "Hurry, Billy, let's go aboard and tidy up."

"And I'll row over and see Harry," said Grant. "They'll probably want to wait till the rain stops."

"You'd better hold up till the wind slacks," advised Jerry, stepping from the shelter of the trees. "I never see it kick up worst in summer."

"We can triple reef," said Billy. "She has beam enough to stand up in most any blow triple reefed."

"Say, youngster, don't go to gettin' that boat o' yours sidling agin them waves," said the hunter, speaking to Grant as the latter started down the steps to the jetty. "These here fresh-water ponds ain't like bein' to sea; they're kind of giddy, and you can't figger 'em."

Grant took the deepest canoe and made the passage of the channel in safety. He emerged from the shore camp within a very few moments, and was soon afloat on his way back.

"It's rough," he remarked, on rejoining his club-mates; "but it'll be good sailing."

"Are they ready?" asked Billy, eagerly.

"All ready when you are. They're having their coffee now."

"Then we'll have ours," said Perry, slicing some ham while Don stirred a great pot of wheat batter

for griddle-cakes, and Jerry turned the coffee-mill with a celerity resembling an electric fan. Things went with a rush before an event.

"What's the course?" asked Deane.

"Start at the outlet; finish here."

"Who'll be judge?" inquired George.

"Nobody," said Grant. "They kicked on our having Jerry so much for judge until they got Dicky Halden to stay with them. So I said, 'Arrange it to suit yourselves,' and came away."

"Bully for you," said Billy, hustling into his sou'-wester. "This feels like a ton of brick alongside of my straw tile."

After a hasty breakfast, Deane and Billy put off for the *Islander*, which danced at her moorings but a short distance from shore. They immediately proceeded to pump out the rain-water, removed the canvas coat protecting the lowered sail, and shipped the rudder and tiller. Captain Deane also dropped the centreboard, raising it again into its box after satisfying himself that all was snug and in working order in that important quarter.

The rain gradually ceased, but the wind continued very fresh. The whitecaps that the boys had noticed half an hour before were slowly but surely approaching the island. Under the lee of Red Ridge, however, the water was much smoother. As Captain

Deane was noting these facts, a creaking of tackle attracted his gaze to the shore camp. He saw that Eugene was already manning the halliards of the rival boat, and that Jack was about to cast off.

"They're ready to race," said he, as Billy finished with the pump. "There she fills."

Even as he spoke Eugene cleated the halliards, while Jack brought the tiller to windward and eased the main sheet. The sail swung briskly to starboard, the block rattled over the traveller as the canvas filled, and the *Madge* glided out into the channel to a hearty cheer. On coming nearer with a jaunty dipping of her pretty prow, the boys could see she was but single reefed.

"Too much sail for the open," was Deane's soliloquy; and aloud to his crew, "Triple reef her, Billy."

The *Madge* came up with a rush. When within fifty feet of the *Islander*, Jack put the tiller down, at the same time hauling on the sheet with a will. The graceful little sailer came about at once, standing straight for the outlet, and thoroughly dousing her coamings every few yards, while not infrequently the crest of an inquisitive wave would come tumbling into the cockpit by way of the weather bow.

The *Islander* had by this time filled away, for Deane had assisted in shortening sail, and, as the *Madge* came nearer, Billy dipped the club colors,

which flew at the gaff-end. The crew of the *Madge* must have observed this little courtesy, for they were scanning their rival at the time; but they did not return the greeting — perhaps they were too flurried to think of it.

The craft kept under the lee of the ridge during the sail to the outlet. The buoys that marked the chosen course, however, were some distance further out; and though Captain Jack was of the opinion that it would be as well to shorten sail before starting, Gene maintained that as they were steadily drawing clear of the *Islander*, owing to the extra sail, they were likely to do so on the return in rougher water.

"Well, if she spills us, we can swim for it," remarked Captain Jack at the outlet, as he brought his boat to the wind to await the *Islander*, which was fast bearing down upon them.

"Ahoy on the *Madge Wildfire*!" called Deane, who was standing at the bow, holding fast to the port shrouds.

"Aboard the *Islander*!" cried Jack, Deane thought rather gruffly.

"Shall we start from the end buoy?"

"That's the course."

"Stand away and we'll join you!"

Jack did so, and the two boats presently came

abreast, the *Islander* choosing the shore or ridge side, while Captain Jack evidently preferred more open water; for he headed the *Madge* obliquely across the lake for some hundred yards before he shifted the helm and laid a course parallel to Captain Cumnor's and the buoys.

"Are you ready?" hallooed Deane, who had been luffing until Jack headed due north, with Eugene hauling at the sheet until the boom swung above the lee gunwale.

"Let her go!" shouted Jack, dropping almost from sight into the little cockpit. The *Madge* leaned dangerously as the full force of the wind stiffened the canvas. She dipped to her coamings, but did not ship water. Gene was seen to add his weight to Jack's on the weather side, after which she moved more easily.

The *Islander* had already secured a slight lead, for the smoother water hard by the buoys suited her exactly. There was no yeasty ribbon of spume curling from her bow, to be sure, nor did she pitch and toss as prettily as her rival, but she made good headway for all that. Each boat settled down to its work as they neared the end of the first furlong, the crews watching each other narrowly. It appeared for a time as if the Deer Lodge "cat" would overtake its rival, but as they finished the second mile, the *Islander*

seemed to have increased her lead by at least twenty yards, at which Captain Jack scowled darkly. The wind was still keen, though the murky storm-scud of the early morning was dissipating before the bright sunshine that had at last broken through the leaden bank of cloud above the ridge.

"Better shake out that reef and head for the buoys," proposed Eugene, who now had a clear view of the *Islander's* stern, with its scarlet lettering and Billy's exasperating smile.

"Then stand by!" responded Jack, throwing the *Madge* into the wind with a great flapping. "Ease the peak halliard."

He manned the throat halliard in person, and together the boys loosened the knots and hoisted the sail with no little celerity.

"Ready about—low bridge!" cried the captain, as the boom swung to leeward with a bang. The lads ducked; the *Madge* also, for the wind appeared to freshen suddenly, or else the increased sail was more than the little vessel could manage. Under went the lee coamings with a great gurgle, a "ss-s-oo" and a splashing in the cockpit, as the terrified captain put the tiller hard to port.

"Bail her! bail her, Gene!" he cried, ducking under the thrashing spar and canvas. "Don't let that boom hit you, or it'll knock you overboard!"

Eugene grasped a pail and fell to work with alacrity, throwing out gallon after gallon, until Jack put the helm over and ordered him to the pump. By this time the *Islander* had secured a winning lead, but the Deer Lodgers determined to continue the chase. The *Madge* was pointed for the buoys, and as she cleared the whitecaps and came about she was seen to gain perceptibly on her rival.

"We ought to have taken this course from the first," grumbled Gene, who felt that the day was lost through his chum's bad judgment.

"It isn't too late," answered Jack, doggedly. "Lie along the seat there so that the wind won't strike you. We'll catch them before the finish."

The *Madge* certainly continued to decrease the gap. By degrees Jack entered the whitecaps again, for it seemed that his boat gained faster in the rougher water and better wind. This, however, was not so.

On board the *Islander* things went more smoothly. For some time Captain Deane had noticed that the waves just even with Red Ridge Ravine were running exceptionally high, probably owing to the wind's striking the lake near shore as it rushed through the mountain gap. It was the knowledge of this fact that had prevented him from shaking out a couple of reefs when the *Madge* was seen to be making up

lost water. He directed Billy to stand at the halliards as the *Islander* entered the rough streak with a fretful pitching and tossing. As soon as it became evident that she might not weather it, he directed Billy to drop the peak halliard until the gaff hung free. This was done, the sail drawing nicely from the throat to the boom-end, with the little vessel doing fully as well, and spurning the whitecaps as before.

"That sort of sailing makes me sick," said Jack, who had observed the manœuvre without noting the cause. "They think they've got the race safe, and are afraid of getting their coat-tails wet," he concluded, in deep disgust.

Eugene kept his position on the seat, for with the additional canvas it was rather dangerous to shift his weight too quickly. He glanced over the coamings, but did not note the choppy sea beyond. So the gallant little *Madge* cut into the whitecaps, reeled, rose, dove, and fell heavily into the trough of two waves with a muffled splash, receiving a generous sprinkling of spray for her indiscretion. Both Jack and Eugene glanced to windward, noting as they did so that a white squall was almost upon them.

"Port your helm!" cried Eugene, bounding to his feet and cutting the halliards from the cleats on the centreboard-box. But before the sail started the

squall struck, and struck hard, completely submerging the lee coamings, and filling the cockpit in a jiffy. She refused to obey her helm as the spilt sail veered and fell with a crash, but sank rapidly, at which the boys threw off their coats,—they wore no shoes,—and jumped to windward as the hull careened.

"Hang to the centreboard!" shouted Captain Jack, whose face was scarcely distinguishable from the wave-crests. "They'll send a dory over. Don't leave the boat."

"I'm not worrying," said Gene, who was pure grit. "We'll soon strike the west shore at this rate," he continued, hauling himself over the slippery hull until he secured a firm hold of the centreboard. "Can you see the *Islander*?"

"Yes. She's come about!" exclaimed Jack, gleefully. "Grant's crowd is running down to the beach."

"Can't you see our fellows?"

"No; just the roof of the camp."

"Well, let them pick us up," said Gene, ungratefully; "I'll not sail in this tub again."

"It's my fault," confessed the captain, who feared a mutiny. "We'll do better next time. Isn't the water cold?"

"Yes, but the squall's going down. There's the *Islander*, now. Don't let them see you're frightened."

"Ahoy the *Madge Wildfire*!" hailed Billy, much alarmed at the sudden turn of affairs.

"Don't answer him," whispered Gene, hoarsely. "He wants us to ask for help."

Jack raised his right hand, which he waved in lieu of reply. A powerful wave broke over the green bottom at the same moment, and striking Jack full in the breast, carried him off the hull. He sank at once in the froth, and was carried twenty feet to leeward in a jiffy.

"Keep your head up!" cried Deane, as he brought the *Islander's* bow to the wind some yards behind the unfortunate skipper. "Cast your line, Billy!"

Billy imagined the *Islander's* tossing bow to be the back of a pitching bronco, and Jack the unruly steer. He was therefore quite at home, and leaning over the water with his left arm about the starboard shroud, hurled the painter with all his force against the wind. It fell with a splash within a couple of feet of Jack's head, and was quickly caught and held.

Deane next drew the sheet taut and shifted the helm, at which the *Islander* moved on the short port tack until Jack had no trouble in grasping Billy's hand. He was pulled aboard, spluttering and angry, but really more frightened than hurt, and immediately turned his attention to Gene and the *Madge*, which were rapidly drifting down upon the rival racer.

"If you want to save your boat you'd better have Marshall fasten a line to her," suggested Deane. "Billy, bring the painter aft."

"Of c-course we want to s-s-save her," grumbled Jack, between his chattering teeth. "A g-good crew will never desert," he concluded tartly.

"I understand that," said the other, smiling blandly.

"G-Gene, can you fasten a line to her?" called the *Madge's* commander, hurriedly, as the boats came abreast.

"Sure thing!"

"Then cast away," said Deane.

Again Billy displayed great cleverness, for the rope-end landed within easy reach from the centre-board. Gene grabbed it, and fearlessly working toward the bow, let himself down without an instant's pause. He was gone from sight some twelve or fifteen seconds,—it seemed much longer to the watchers,—but finally, to Jack's indescribable relief, was seen to be making for the *Islander*, hand over hand along the rope. Both Jack and Billy helped him in.

"She'll hold," said he, curtly. "You can't make the lee of the ridge with that weight, Cumnor."

"I agree with you," replied Deane, quite casually, with a comprehensive glance at the lake and sky.

"We may be able to make the west channel, though," and he forthwith shifted the tiller. "Man the peak, Billy."

Billy raised the gaff, while Jack and Gene held the little hawser. The *Islander* labored badly under the extra sail and weight, and Billy was kept continually at the pump. Deane set a course due for the island jetty, calculating that the flotilla would about make the channel mentioned. The progress was slow, but after an hour's sailing, during which Grant and Jerry spoke them from a dory, they entered the still water of the channel, where the disabled *Madge* was anchored temporarily. Harry and Paul were on hand with the skiff, and took off their disgruntled club-mates after the usual formal exchange of civilities. The *Islander* then went over the course alone, and that night Harry and Walter delivered the banner. It was raised the next day without a cheer, for somehow it seemed out of place at the time. The *Madge* was towed to her moorings during the afternoon, righted, and put in racing trim again, a quantity of ballast being added to what she already carried.

Two days later the second race was arranged. The start was made at Red Brook, the finish taking place at the Bald Hill ledges, where the clubs were watching eagerly. For the first mile the boats were forced to tack every hundred yards or so. During

this important part of the race, Deane's superb handling of the *Islander* told in his favor, for when the rivals finally stood away for the ledges, the *Madge* was a sixteenth of a mile to the rear. The race to the finish was hotly contested, but at the line the *Islander* prevailed by about seventy yards, the *Madge* having gained considerable in the run home. In consequence the banner remained on the island through August, which was pleasantly passed by a majority of the boys in sailing, fishing, trap-shooting, or watching the conscientious training of the four aspirants for the gold vase.

Opinions differed greatly as to the ultimate result. Jerry believed Grant a sure winner, and was ever ready to proclaim his views. Harry's graceful, pretty style had won him some friends, while Eugene's quick, vigorous stroke had made him the general favorite for the event. He was well known as a fleet and courageous long-distance runner, and, in spite of his irascible moods, was greatly liked by his club-mates—they respected his ability and admired him for it.

With Perry things had gone awry. He was longer getting over his river adventure than he had expected, and when he did enter his shell for his daily spins, it was seen that his stroke lacked the old strength and power that had won him the juvenile

event two years previous at Lake George. His blade work, too, was very uncertain, and though he dieted and worked faithfully, it was some time before he made any apparent improvement. One morning his stroke appeared particularly weak and ragged to Eugene, who was watching from the boat-house; and when the gleaming shell shot from sight behind the island, he rubbed his hands together with a self-satisfied smile, muttering as he did so, "Two medals as good as won, and it should have been three. I'll get even yet."

The first of September marked the opening of the grouse and deer season. On that day a noticeable mountaineer might have been seen leaving a backwoods farm near the Milford turnpike and journeying westward with a brisk step in the direction of the lake. He was clad in brown overalls and an old coat of a bluish cast, which had been fashioned on the lines of a cutaway; a corduroy waistcoat adorned with German silver buttons, cowhide boots, and a faded black felt hat completed the man's attire, though upon closer inspection you would have observed, without considering the steer's-horn powder-flask and brass charger, an ornamented buckskin game-bag and a pair of striped wristlets. An old-fashioned rifle, with "top and top" barrels, rested easily upon the broad, sloping shoulder — an interest-

ing gun, truly, with prominent hammers, decorative brass trigger-guard and butt; wad-case of polished metal set neatly into the handsome walnut stock, which was further embellished with nickel figures of a gliding mallard and a six-point stag in repose.

And the man's visage was really good to see. The broad head rose ruggedly from the massive frame, as if it might withstand the rigors of another sixty years without becoming more grizzled. His nose was large, high in the bridge, and hooked. There was a droll pitch to the small, light eyes, and a suggestion of endless activity and decision in the pointed beard and close-cropped mustaches that showed a mouth like a sabre-cut. At intervals he spoke to his long-eared, brush-tailed hound in a high, resonant voice, that was — like the morning — full of good cheer.

"Now, you go a little keerful there, old feller. We ain't after rabbits — big game, sonny, and don't you let Jerry Quick's wuthless pup nose you out. Hi, stop it!" he exclaimed, as the eager hound jumped out after a gray rabbit. "Here, Drum! here, Drum!"

But Drum was gone, quickly running the rabbit to the nearest wall. The dog's impatient owner, much nettled, strode after, and stealing up behind the excited animal, administered several little strokes with a white oak sapling that resulted in a happy understanding for the rest of the day.

In due time, master and dog descended Button Rock and swung along the beach to the shore camp. They came to a halt some little distance off, where they stood enjoying the lively scene in the channel. It was perhaps an hour before the midday meal, and both clubs seemed to the visitor to be having, as Jerry had said, a "regular bustin' up." The islanders, with the exception of Perry and Grant, who were resting after the morning practice, were evidently engaged in a game of water polo, and the visitor noted with some little astonishment that an old friend seemed to be doing service as ball; for the boys were splashing about on his back, hauling him this way and that, and finally sinking from sight altogether, but coming up again nearer shore. Jerry finally broke loose, and gaining the beach, made for the steps with unusual sprightliness, while the boys, with a triumphant shout, returned to deeper water for a final plunge.

The Deer Lodgers were enjoying a novel race. Walter and Harry had entered light canoes, to which they had harnessed their dogs. The other fellows, aboard the *Madge*, were coaxing the animals into making a start. After much whining and barking they paddled off for the anchored boat, Von and Tan leading, until Gray Mark, after trying in vain to bolt, settled down to his work with Hector. Then they had a very pretty race, finishing about even amid



THEY STOOD ENJOYING THE SCENE. Page 254.

much merriment, to which Drum immediately raised an objection.

The boys looked toward the clamorous baying, and, catching sight of the portly figure, put off at once for shore, racing up the beach. Harry was in the lead and spoke first.

"Hello!" he said, extending a dripping hand. "You're Mr. Halden, aren't you? We'd about given you up."

"But we're mighty glad to see you," added Paul.

"Seems like I'd jest come in time," replied Dicky, bringing his huge palm down upon Drum's back to restore order. "Lovely day, ain't it?"

"Yes," said Harry. "We were going grouse-shooting this afternoon."

"Bird-hunters, hey? Is that the way you train your dogs?" With twinkling eyes he glanced down the beach, where Hector and mate were disporting in the shallow water, tumbling the canoe after them.

"Oh, they're young and need exercise," said Harry, as Walter was seen to unharness the festive canines. "Come and have some dinner. You must be hungry after your long tramp."

So Dicky's all-too-brief visit began with a hearty meal of fried pickerel. Before the first week slipped by he had heard the whole story of the disagreement at Glen Gorge, and seemed inclined to side with the

Deer Lodge boys, which was quite natural under the circumstances. Jerry and he would meet every day for a little chat over their pipes, and they were always sure of an interested group of listeners at each camp.

It was still too warm to make shooting a pleasure, though of course the dogs were put through their paces regularly, to the satisfaction of their owners. The training for the boat-race was watched with great interest, and the Milford papers in some mysterious way continued printing reports of the different trials, which did the boys great credit. When Perry did begin to improve he made great progress, but the time looked so short that a large majority of the onlookers conceded the race to Eugene.

The field trials proved one of the most interesting events of the summer. Jerry and Dicky were of course chosen as judges, and though neither had ever witnessed a modern field trial, they knew dogs from *a* to *z*. Plenty of birds were found on the blueberry ridges, where the event was stubbornly contested. Billy's Spinaway and Gadfly proved dogs of great substance, good rangers, and quick retrievers, but the latter mangled his birds badly in spite of all the Arizona lad had done to break the fault. Walter's pair, Von and Tan, were well broken, fair rangers and retrievers, but did not show quite so well as Harry's handsome brace, Hector and

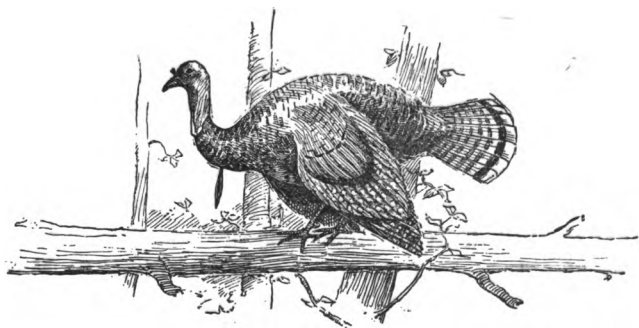
Gray Mark. The latter dogs, too, located more birds in shorter time, which finally decided the judges in their favor.

With the completion of the field trials, all interest was centred in the boat-race, though Donald succeeded in catching a two-pound trout measuring sixteen inches the same week, thus taking the lead in the angling contest. For some time Eugene had been growing uneasy over Perry's improved stroke and dogged perseverance, and had got in the habit of secreting himself in the willows about the time Perry did his evening mile. The buoys for the east as well as for the west course had been placed a quarter-mile apart. Just a fortnight before the race — one Saturday evening — Eugene held his stop-watch ready as Perry flashed past the middle buoy of the east course, heading south. His long powerful stroke drove the shell rapidly; his blade work was clean, crisp, decisive; and his muscular brown arms moved easily, with great vigor.

Eugene climbed a tree as the shell neared the first buoy, and caught the time, as he thought, pretty exactly — one minute thirty seconds! To make sure, he took the time at the second quarter — one minute twenty-four seconds — and walked soberly toward camp. He was on hand Monday evening, and was again astonished at the remarkable performances of

his redoubtable rival. He took the third evening to think about it, but on the fourth — Wednesday — entered his shell as Perry left the island jetty in his. They neared each other on the way out, and Eugene immediately started to race. He commenced rowing thirty-five strokes to the minute, soon raising it to thirty-eight or forty. Perry followed, rowing about thirty-four, and despite all Eugene could do to distance him, held his position a scant boat-length behind. At the completion of a mile, Eugene suddenly eased his stroke and drew off at a tangent, finally resting on his oars. Before Perry had turned his shell he started for the channel, rowing close to shore as though he wished to avoid a return "brush." Paul gave him his usual rub-down in the boat-house, after which he went quietly to his couch, where he lent but deaf ears to the chatter on the veranda, the plaintive notes of the whippoorwills, or the songs on the island. Before daylight he had started for the outlet, taking with him a couple of bank-notes and a side of bacon.





CHAPTER XVII

THE MONARCH FALLS

ON reaching the outlet, Eugene struck across the ridge toward Panther Ledge. Kiddy McCafrey no longer doubted the boy's loyalty, or rather his disloyalty, to the island club, and had for some time permitted Eugene to come almost within hailing distance of the cave. Once or twice Matt had uttered a feeble protest, but Kiddy had silenced him. "Why, Matt, he's a pretty smooth lad himself, and won't give us away for nobody," he said, on one occasion. "If he does, he don't get the fish—see? Besides, he'd be afraid we'd let on that he was payin' us for keepin' it."

"That's so."

"And there ain't no bouquets changin' hands up at the lake," remarked Kiddy. "They'll have another 'scrap' before long."

McCaffrey seemed in no hurry to continue his kidnapping operations against Perry. He wisely believed that the last of the summer was the best time to carry out his plans, and though he said nothing to Matt about it, it is probable that he feared Jerry Quick not a little. The hunter knew the woods blindfolded, he told himself, and would be likely to secure friends to assist in the search the moment Perry disappeared.

"Ye may never get this Langdon sonny off nowhere alone," Matt said one day.

"Sure," boasted Kiddy in reply, "there's lots of time, and I've got my thinkers workin' now."

Perhaps Kiddy would not have been so contented had Matt been less familiar with the subtle art of woodcraft. The rustic was having the time of his life, and kept the cave larder plentifully supplied with squirrels, both black and gray,—which he trapped in figure-four and Indian deadfalls,—grouse, trout, huckleberries, and occasionally vegetables, which he found under cover of night in farm gardens along the turnpike. In addition to these articles, Eugene brought canned goods and biscuits. So you see there was no cause for worrying.

The problem of money for liquor and tobacco was

speedily overcome. Matt dug nearly two pounds of ginseng root, which he dried by the camp-fire, and for which he received seven dollars in Milford. During the summer he also marketed over thirty pounds of trout in the county seat, which netted him eighteen dollars. When he returned from these trips Kiddy would open his heart out of pure gratitude, and would permit Matt to wear the diamond and checkered vest for two days at a time — but never to town, where it might have lost lustre.

Not a wildcat entered to share the hospitalities of the cave — or Kiddy's six-shooter, either. The trout did finely, and regularly bumped its nose against the bait-box at feeding time, when Matt would lower himself with a handful of crickets or chopped meat. As summer waned, it was quite evident there would be an abundance of deer and other small game for the fall shooting. Matt proposed that they purchase a gun, but Kiddy said he had gun enough for anything larger than a chipmunk, and proved what he said soon after ; for Matt, on his way down the ravine Wednesday evening, espied a wild turkey gobbler parading high overhead among the branches and light domes of foliage. He dropped from sight into a clump of bushes, and, stealing back to camp, acquainted Kiddy with the fact. They returned together and found the bird executing a very pretty march upon a horizontal log,

from which it came fluttering to the ground at the pistol-shot — a great, glossy, blue-black fellow, with barred tail and flecked wings. He looked almost too handsome to pick, and as Matt said, he would bring five dollars in Milford, was allowed to hang over night in his fine feathers.

Early in the morning Matt was awakened by Eugene's shouts. He shook his companion briskly, who immediately jumped to his feet, his hand to his hip.

"It's only the sonny," reassured Matt, hearkening. "What'll bring him here this early?"

"Don't know. Where is he?"

Matt swung his hand to the southward.

"I'll go down," said Kiddy, crawling into the cleft, and cautiously dropping the rope from the limb. "If I suspicion anything, I'll not come back directly." The other nodded as McCaffrey swung off. He went but a short distance before he located the voice, and saw Eugene looking down upon him from a shelf of rock.

"I want to see you," said the schoolboy, guardedly. "All alone?"

"Sure," said Kiddy, lighting a cheroot. "Want the fish?"

"Not just now. It's about something else. But I haven't had a mouthful to-day."

"Neither have I."

"Can't we go to your camp and fry some bacon?"

"Ho, ho! I don't know about that," replied the Westerner, thoughtfully.

"Oh, what's the difference! I know you fellows are hiding near here, don't I? I've known it for some time, and I haven't said a word, have I? You're afraid I'm going to report you to the game constable, I suppose," he concluded, laughing unpleasantly.

Kiddy glanced sharply from under his drawn brows.

"Yes, you've done the right thing," he answered, just a bit patronizingly, "and I appreciate it. I don't believe you'd throw us down."

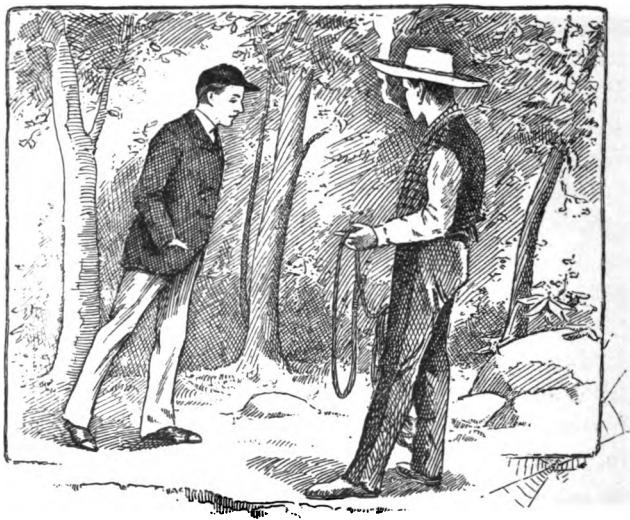
"Indeed I wouldn't," responded Gene, decisively.

"Well, come along," said Kiddy, taking the trail to the ledge-top. They were some little time in getting up, for the path was very rough. "Now, our outfit ain't a great way from here," he continued, as they neared the pine. "Are you much of a sailor?" He eyed the lad curiously as he shook out the rope.

"Fair," said Eugene, wondering if the man was twitting him on the capsizing of the *Madge*.

"Then you can come down this rope after me." He took a turn round the sapling and dropped the ends off, while Eugene continued to pace nervously to and fro. The latter looked down the sheer wall

— eighty feet! What if the man meant foul play? What if Kiddy should turn on *him*, instead of Perry or some other of the wealthy set? But his courage



"ARE YOU MUCH OF A SAILOR?"

did not desert him, and he presently explained away these fears.

"Go ahead," he said quite cheerfully. "I'll follow you."

Kiddy picked up the bacon and lowered himself at once. Eugene watched him disappear where the

heavy limb touched the rock, and, having made up his mind to follow, did not hesitate. Taking a careful grip on both ropes, he let himself slowly over the edge. Then, twisting his leg about them, as gymnasts will do in descending from a trapeze, he slid down with little or no effort. Kiddy was waiting in the niche, and helped him in, after which he started the rope with a few jerks and pulled it after them. They next joined Matt in the cave.

"You've found a snug little corner, truly," began Eugene, after nodding to the quarryman. "How on earth did you ever know about it? And a turkey gobbler! a wild one, at that. Now where's the trout?"

"Down here," said Matt, hastily screwing Kiddy's headlight into the coarse cotton shirt he wore. He went over to the great narrow cleft, down which the bright sunshine was already sifting, and pointed to the spring below. As soon as the boy's eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he made out the bright gleam marking the water. Far above, on a narrow step running obliquely from the ledge top to the cave, a slender kestrel sat preening its plumage.

"The trout's doin' well, ain't it?" said Matt, appealing to his captain.

"Fine as silk," answered Kiddy, settling himself comfortably. "Dish us up some grub, Matt. Here, the boy's brought some bacon. Cut it thin, now, and

mind you have the coffee right — and plenty of it," he concluded indulgently.

Before long the simple breakfast was over with. Eugene munched the bacon and Matt's corn-bread with a gusto; but the coffee, concocted *à la* cow-camp, was rather too black for a schoolboy to relish. He noticed that Matt was extremely careful in regard to the fire, and that little or no smoke was allowed to escape into the rude chimney.

Kiddy held the rope while Eugene lowered himself for a look at the trout. Before descending, he had cut what he guessed to be a foot measure, and had divided it into twelve parts with notches. With this he was able to come pretty close to the fish's true measurement, which he made out to be between nineteen and twenty inches in length, and much heavier in proportion than the one Donald had last registered. He seemed in excellent spirits on returning to the cave.

"I tell you what's a fact, Matt, that fish is a bouncer. I'll be ready for it before long, but, as I said before, it isn't just what I came down for to-day." He paused, glancing from one sunburned face to the other.

"Let's hear it," said Kiddy, with a grim smile. "We can't help you none without you tell us," he concluded, eying the boy attentively.

Again Eugene hesitated. "I understand that," he said, clearing his throat with an effort. "It's a kind of funny scheme, but it's plausible."

"I don't misdoubt that," agreed the Westerner, selecting a fresh cigar from an assorted box, which he passed to Matt. "Let's have it," he persisted mildly.

"I have your promises to keep 'mum'?"

"Why, nobody couldn't hammer a word out of me with a sledge," said Kiddy, biting savagely at the cigar-end. "Whatever's on your mind, I'll help you out."

"So will I," avowed the top-hand; "and not open my mouth to nobody."

Eugene arose and began to walk about the little room, now and then pausing at the gobbler, which he pretended to study; but he was really in deep meditation.

"I suppose you fellows know that there's a 'frost' up at the lake — has been ever since that day at Glen Gorge?"

Matt leered foolishly, while Kiddy smiled in cheerful assent.

"Well, that isn't the worst of it. To begin with, my chum and I had the hardest kind of luck the first day down this way. We saw a panther cross the log out there at the end of these ledges, and didn't have anything but a pistol with us."

"Ye mean a bob-cat or catamount, don't ye?" propounded the mountaineer.

"No, sir, a panther — a long-tailed rascal, with an eye like your diamond, Matt. My chum missed him with the revolver, and so we went on down the run. At Hawk's Nest I hooked this same trout you have in the box, I verily believe, and he, too, got away. That left us in pretty bad spirits; so when I found out that a couple of the island boys had followed us, and, as I thought, had stolen our bait-box, I was mad clear through, and punched them for it. Of course I didn't catch the fish," he continued hastily, "but I feel it belongs to me: I was the first to hook it, and as those fellows were unsportsmanlike enough to follow us to our pool, they don't deserve it — and won't get it. I'll bring it into camp next week, when the lake'll be gay with visitors, just before the boat-race; and they'll not have sand enough to claim it. That'll give me one medal, sure; but I want two, — and the gold vase," he concluded, quickening his step.

"That's it," ventured Kiddy, drawing thoughtfully on the weed.

"Yes, that's it. We lost the sailing race through my chum's idiotic navigation, and now all I've got to fall back on is the boat-race — single sculls, you know. I don't believe the fellows will manage to kill any wildcats, for Walt Hillman and Harry Martin have

hunted and laid bait regularly; and the panther hasn't been heard from since. So I've simply *got* to win the boat-race, and take down two medals out of six. How'll that sound at school?"

"Good!" replied the men, cajolingly.

"But I don't know nothin' about fast rowin'," added Kiddy. "I can't help you on that line."

"I realize that," continued Eugene, coming to a stand before the outstretched forms. "It's about the fellow I've got to beat."

"Oh, I see."

"Yes, it's about the fellow I've got to beat," he went on, quite naturally. "His name is Langdon — Perry Langdon — and though I haven't anything special against him, I don't like the way his crowd has acted."

"Of course not," spoke Kiddy, from a cloud of smoke.

"So I thought it would be a grand good joke to tie him down a few days before the race to make him break training — don't you see? He couldn't do his best then, and I'd have a chance. I'm not at all afraid of him, but I've set my heart on those two medals and the vase."

"It's quite the neatest job I ever heard," said Kiddy, smoothly, while Matt set to coughing out some smoke he had swallowed at the mention of Perry's name.

"He'd have to have the best of treatment; you'd have to promise that," said Eugene.

"We'd use him good," responded Kiddy.

"The race is a week from this Saturday. If he could be caught away from camp about Wednesday, and held till Friday, I could beat him twenty lengths."

"But how could we ketch him?"

"I've thought it all out, and it's easy enough. He's taking his morning walks every day now from the camp to the outlet and back, along the beach. Since the season opened he carries a gun. All you have to do is to have Matt call him to the brush to shoot something, and drop on him."

"Or he could tell him there was a wildcat down this here cleft," proposed the quick-witted McCaffrey. "He'd want a medal for the killin' of it, and would foller right on, wouldn't he? Matt could bring him past the top of the cleft, and I could be wailin' below like a sick puss. Then Matt would lead him down the rope, and I could slip my lariat over him as he shoves in."

"Kidder, you're a wonder!" ejaculated Flint, in a voice like so much thunder.

"Shut up!" cried Kiddy, incensed at the useless noise. "Would he have the nerve to come down the rope?" he asked, with a curious glance at the boy.

"He's got any amount of nerve," replied Eugene, avoiding the deliberate gaze. "Now about the releasing?"

"Oh, we'll attend to that."

"Very well; but he'll know where to find you if you bring him here in broad daylight."

"I see; maybe we'd better bandage his eyes."

"There'll be a fuss in camp, too."

"What can they do? They'll think he's got frightened out of the race hisself," suggested Kiddy, who meant to ease the lad's fears.

"I guess I can trust to your discretion," said Eugene, slipping the bank-notes into Kiddy's hand. "Now I must be going back."

"Stay and have some turkey."

"No; I've got to do some rowing this afternoon."

"Take it with you."

"I'd like to, but I didn't bring my gun," laughed the boy. "I won't be able to get down much for a few days, for I've got to observe regular hours. I'll keep you posted though." He paused at the hole leading to the entrance. "By the way," he said, "I forgot to tell you that Dicky Halden is stopping with us — you must know him, Matt — he's nearly seven feet tall, and would make a bad customer, I imagine."

"We'll remember him," said Kiddy, as he peeped out before adjusting the rope upon the limb. "So

long." He held out his hand, which Eugene took with an odd feeling of revulsion. Then the Deer Lodger swung off, and was soon turning his flushed face homeward, more excited and unstrung than he suspected.

"Well, if Kiddy does hold him for a ransom, he'll get it fast enough. Ten thousand dollars isn't a month's income to the old gentleman. However, it's none of my business." But all the same Eugene felt ill at ease. He found it impossible to do any rowing that day, and, in fact, to glance toward the island or mingle with his club-mates. During the afternoon he said he expected letters, and started for the Eddy, where he overheard considerable speculation on the forthcoming race. Mike O'Reilly, Danny Burns, and the other quarrymen were true to Grant and his club, though they seemed to realize that the race would be hotly contested all the way. They were awaiting the way freight to load a car for Tim Anderson, and were enjoying the cool of the store when Eugene came in to inquire for the camps' mail. Danny was saying:—

"What I loikes about them fellers is the fact that they're all foine young gintlemen, and can pull an oar agin Mike here or any other man grown. An' shoot, too! Hammie Tuttle was sayin' only t'other day that they could bust them saucer-birds like regular circus

shooters. I'll be up at the lake a week come Saturday if I'm laid off for the month," he averred in conclusion.

"Davy was a-sayin' yesterday that Tim was to give the boys the hull day," bellowed Si Phipps, reaching for a box of raisins.

"I'm with yer, Danny," put in Sherm Tracy, who still remembered his voyage to Mexico. "It'll do me blinkers good to see them skipjacks come about and stand away like a couple of swallers on the wing. It's a pity I lost the capsizin'."

"They's to be speakin' and singin' at night, with heaps of plum-duff like the islander put up after the fight," said George Markham. "The Burton boy said we'd all be welcome to the best that was goin'," he concluded, following Phipps's example.

"It's a foine lad he is," said Danny, knocking his clay pipe in the palm of his hand. "They're all foine young gintlemen, an' no mistake."

"I hope you'll all have a good time," said Mr. Sallman, the storekeeper, as he placed the raisins on an upper shelf.

Now Eugene had listened to this conversation all too unwillingly. He was standing behind the framework containing the letter-boxes, and had not been observed by the men in the rear. He continued to sort and tie up the letters and papers as they were

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passed out to him, but his mind was somewhere else. At the conclusion of Danny's last speech, he turned and made for the door, walking over the dock and past the stone mill, from which issued a discordant screech from the planers, the regular, rasping sounds to the drop of the saws, and the rumble of the rubbing-bed. A number of cutters were hard at work on twenty-inch curb just beyond, pointing and fine-axing the upper edge and outer side. The boy thought the noises distracting, and speedily left them behind; but the sound of Danny's voice would linger in his ears: "All foine young gentlemen, an' no mistake." He almost wished he had not visited the gorge that morning.

It was late when he reached camp. Harry took the island mail over, while the others fell to reading their letters. This gave Eugene an opportunity to eat a hasty supper and "turn in," which he forthwith improved. In the morning he was less nervous, and did a fast mile to his entire satisfaction. He was at one time on the point of again visiting Kiddy and refusing to countenance the scheme, but he eased his conscience by telling himself there was little or no danger to Perry, — he never considered the danger to himself, — and it was only a part of the rivalry, after all. The islanders had resorted to mean tactics to obtain their information concerning the big trout;

why could he not do likewise to obtain the gold vase? He was now more convinced than ever that he could not beat Perry in a fair race, for Jack had told him the evening before that Perry had rowed the full course, from the Red Brook buoy to the Bald Hill ledges, two miles, in less than fifteen minutes, and had beaten Grant twelve lengths.

Perry continued to take the walk to the outlet and back with regularity. He was, as he put it, "as hard as a brick," and meant to keep so. As Squirrel Island led in the angling contest, the events were practically even—two against two; and as it was reasonable to suppose that neither club would kill the panther or a wildcat before the outing closed, the boat-race seemed likely to decide the banner's ownership, for the final event might go either way. Should the Greyhound Club capture it, after Perry had been victorious with the sculls, the summer's campaign would end in a tie. But Perry did not believe it would terminate in this way. He had heard a portion of Grant's poem, and considered it a very fair effort. Billy said he was at work on something good, too, and though the Arizona lad would not disclose his secret, the boys expected something novel at least—and they got it.

The first few days of the last week saw a couple of extra tents erected on the island for the reception

of visitors. The shooting-box also received an addition, and was painted white. A naphtha launch, the tender to the *Grayling*, was sent up by General Burton, together with a plentiful supply of stores for the larder, camp chairs, etc. The general never did things by halves. Other pleasant surprises were in store, too. On Tuesday Grant received a message from Jimmy Lander, stating that he and his hound were about to leave Cleveland on their way East. He also received many letters from his class- and school-mates, asking if they might come up for the race. To these he sent prompt and cordial replies, saying that all would be most welcome, promising a good time, and telling them to bring their guns.

As Eugene noted these unusual preparations, it seemed that he could not bear the thought of any complicity with the miscreants at Glen Gorge. Yet the thought of coming off victorious before a large crowd of onlookers was very sweet. To be the winner of the gold vase at the Mink Lake regatta! But it could not be—no, it must not be. He must come to an understanding with Kiddy and Matt at once, and Wednesday morning borrowed ten dollars of Paul and a like amount of Harry. He still had twelve of his own, ten of which he placed with the borrowed money, and started for the gorge by a circuitous route, firmly resolved to end all connection

with the rascally cave-dwellers. He approached Panther Ledge from the north, and, stealing over the great mass of rock, whistled shrilly.

Matt appeared almost at once at the mouth of the cave, and Eugene waved to him. As soon as the rustic caught sight of the boy, he raised a warning hand and vanished. This action must have struck Eugene unfavorably, for he withdrew to a thicket of scrub oaks, from which he had a fair view of the entrance. In a moment or two Kiddy appeared in the niche. He looked toward the thicket, and saw Eugene's cap waving above the foliage. After some consideration he adjusted the rope and slid to the ground. Eugene also advanced, wondering as he did so how he should break his resolutions to Kiddy, who looked more daring than ever as he came up with the handle of his six-shooter showing above a leather holster. But the boy might have spared himself any worry on that score, for Kiddy's first words enlightened and appalled him at once.

"We've got him tied fast," said he, with a malicious smile.

"Got who?" stammered Eugene, scarcely believing his ears.

"Oh, come off," retorted Kiddy, irritably. "Have you forgot? The Langdon sonny — see?"

Eugene reeled about the rock, finally seating him-

self on a raised shelf. "How did you get him?" he asked faintly. "Is he hurt?"

"Not a bit," said Kiddy, answering the last question first. "Why, he come right down after Matt like I told you he would, and I dropped on to him with my lariat. What you so white in the face for, anyway? It's your own doin', ain't it?"

Eugene winced. "Oh, I'm afraid they'll find you out," he said. "There's going to be a big crowd at the lake for Saturday's race, and some may come before. I came down to tell you not to do it."

"You're too late. You told us to take him Wednesday, and we did — about three hours ago."

"Did he cry much?"

"Not a whimper. He flung around some, but Matt held his legs from behind till I tied his arms; then he writ this note." He produced a folded sheet addressed in pencil to George Langdon, Squirrel Island Club.

"Let's look at it," said Eugene, eagerly. "You won't deliver it?"

"Mebbe so. Just read it out loud."

"Dear George," Perry had written, "I've taken it into my head to walk to Milford and perhaps to Port Jervis. If I'm not back for the boat-race, don't worry, but tell Grant I'm very sorry to disappoint

him, and that he'd better enter Deane or Billy in my place. No more at present. Your affectionate brother, PERRY."

Eugene scanned the note with a sinking heart, for its import was quite clear.

"He doesn't want to alarm them at camp," said he, huskily, "but wants everything to go off as arranged. That's what I call a fine spirit."

"It's kind of lucky for us," said Kiddy, who viewed things from a different standpoint. "They'll be nothing to worry over just now."

"No," said Eugene, with a long sigh of relief. "Not till Friday, anyway. Matt can take the note up this afternoon, and say he met Perry on the road."

"That's what we allowed."

"Well, you've got to let him out Friday night, and get out yourselves."

"Perhaps."

"There's no perhaps about it," cried Gene, passionately. "Here's thirty dollars, Kiddy. Now say you'll do as I advise."

"Sure we will."

"Without fail?"

"Certain," said Kiddy, reaching for the bills.

"You needn't worry over his telling about it right away; he's not that kind of a chap. It'll be the best

thing for you, man, for you'd run a big risk to hold him longer, I tell you — a big risk."

"It's a go, then."

"Well, that's all. If I don't see you again, leave the trout in the box."

Kiddy shook his head in assent as they parted. Eugene hurried back to camp, where he watched furtively for Matt. Toward sunset he saw him shuffling up the beach, at which he withdrew to the shelter of the lodge. Arthur met the rustic, and Eugene, glancing from the window, saw him take the paper after a few words and enter his brother's skiff, while Matt turned on his heel and disappeared in the woods, as Kiddy had directed.

Arthur delivered the note promptly and lingered a moment in the hope of hearing the news, for he had recognized the writing. He presently overheard some excited talk in an undertone, which only made him more curious. In a few moments Billy appeared, wearing a sober countenance for once.

"Perry Langdon's out of the race," said he, laconically. "Don't understand it."

Arthur cocked his head in surprise. "Out of the race!" he repeated. "What do you mean?"

"That's what he wrote George. I fancy he's over-trained, and wants a rest."

This seemed to be the general verdict; and though



"OUT OF THE RACE!" REPEATED ARTHUR.

George worried some at first, as was quite natural, his club-mates soon convinced him that Perry would turn up by Friday much benefited by the rest.

Thursday morning Grant was overjoyed at sight

of two familiar figures hailing the islanders from the north shore.

"Jimmy Lander and Bonaparte!" he cried, as Jerry hustled after him into the *Undine*, pushed off, and then returned for Crusty before crossing. As they neared the middle of the channel, Grant made a trumpet of his hands, and called out, "'Better late than never!'"

"Jest in time for the bustin' up," said Jerry, with an easy salute. "What's been brownin' you that a-way, Chesterfield?"

"A little fresh air," replied Lander, eying the canoe and its occupants in frank delight. "How are you, boys?" He spoke so heartily it was good to hear him.

"Fine!" said Grant, and "Tol'able," said Jerry, as they beached the canoe and threatened to shake Jimmy's arms clean off.

"What's Bones been a-gettin'?" demanded Jerry, as the dogs exchanged greetings too. "He's that fat he can't walk, let alone run."

"Just a few jack-rabbits," laughed Lander. "The island looks prettier than ever," he added, more gravely.

"And they've been feedin' 'hop-up' at the camps," avowed the hunter, as he tossed the traveller's valise into the canoe. "You never seen such times afore,

Chesterfield. Dicky Halden's up with the Drum dog, and we can shoot a buck to-morrow."

"Or this afternoon," suggested Jimmy. "I feel like a schoolboy myself, and am ready to drive a ridge this minute."

"Well, we'll go over and have some lunch," proposed Grant. "There, Jimmy, the camps are cheering you."

It was as Grant said. Deane had acquainted Harry with the rather unexpected arrival, and the Deer Lodgers were down on the beach trying to drown their rivals across the channel. Lander raised his hat in acknowledgment of the cordial welcome.

"It's been that a-way most all summer," said Jerry. "I never see the like."

Before the repast was finished, Jimmy had received a very fair account of the events of the summer that Grant had not fully described in his letters. His sympathies were of course entirely with Grant and the islanders, though his motto was ever, "Fair play."

Harry and Dicky came over during the meal and accepted Grant's cordial invitation to join the hunt. All were eager to go but Eugene, who said he preferred to spend the afternoon on the lake. He was very glad of Lander's advent, for during the prepara-

tion for the hunt the discussion of Perry's absence seemed to have been dropped by his club-mates.

It was proposed to drive to Red Ridge from Button Rock, and Dicky was invited to make the first start, while Jerry agreed to put the boys on the best runways. The party left at midday for the ridge ravine. About twenty minutes after Eugene put Dicky and the dogs ashore on Button Rock, after which he returned for his afternoon siesta with a feeling that victory was well within his grasp. Before nightfall, however, he had changed his views materially. Let me tell you how it happened.

When Drum, Crusty, and Bones were released by Dicky Halden, they scampered around with their noses to earth, uttering occasional impatient yelps in their efforts to find a track. They ranged far apart, covering a half-mile in a short time. Halden slowly descended from Button Rock to Red Ridge, the dogs keeping within sight as they trotted this way and that with their tails waving industriously behind them. They were all grand fox dogs, but Crusty was excellent on deer as well.

It is probable that the noise and tumult at the lake during the summer months had driven the deer from the vicinity; for nothing was started on Button Rock, which, being high, was usually considered an excellent place to find deer through the day. There was

another advantage in starting on Button Rock, too: the deer almost invariably followed the pitch-pines on Red Ridge, crossing near the summit, where Jerry had stationed the boys in a line fifty yards apart with instructions not to fire to the side under any consideration. "Not if a five-prong buck plants himself ten feet away." Jerry had lived his life in the woods, comprehended the dangers incidental to hunting in parties, and prepared for the same accordingly. He never would run the slightest risk under any circumstances, and refused to hunt with those who did.

The boys had stood upon their runways perhaps two hours when they heard old Bonaparte give voice in the direction of the Orshank swamp. It sounded two miles away, but they gripped their rifles excitedly and peered through the deep woodland in the hope of catching sight of a bounding stag. They saw nothing, but heard Drum "give lip" soon after, followed by Crusty almost at once. It was a clear, still day, pleasantly cool, and the dogs' voices rang merrily: Bones' deep roar mingling with Drum's loud, steady baying and Crusty's shrill, irregular treble in as pretty a canine orchestra as you ever have heard. Then all at once the baying ceased, at which Jerry, who was standing with Lander at the end of the line, remarked sententiously, "Fox, consarn him!"

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"There's little doubt of that," replied his companion, leisurely filling a brier-root pipe. "He's probably run to cover."

"Yes, he holed up, I'll allow," agreed the trapper. "And that ain't the wust of it. I've got to get my pup."

"Oh, Dick will coax him off," said Lander, as Jerry shouldered his gun. "The dogs may pick up the scent again, too—they're not barking. Don't take that long walk for nothing."

"I've learned my pup to stay at a hole, and there he'll stay till I come in," Jerry maintained. "It ain't only a piece over the ridge."

He started off briskly, but hadn't gone a dozen yards before the baying broke forth afresh, more clamorous than ever.

"They're reelin' it off again like the track smoked some," he continued, listening. "Now they're leavin' Orshank and runnin' nigh Mink Brook. I never see a red fox move to a swamp afore—must be a gray. They circled quite consid'able in Orshank."

"It might be a white rabbitt," remarked Lander, mischievously. "Bones has become partial to rabbits."

"Well, dogs don't lip in that a-way after a rabbit," retorted Jerry, who felt hurt at the suggestion. "It ain't no use standin' here. We've got to shoot

that animal to get the dogs, and we may as well move over."

"There! somebody's shouting."

"Yes, it's Dicky. Call the lads in for a quick start." He motioned to Grant, who was nearest, and the word was passed on. The fellows came running in, for the dogs were coming nearer, though moving to the southeast, toward Spoke Timber.

"Drop your shootin'-irons!" cried Halden, as a dark hat and grizzled beard showed above some scrub oaks. "I never was took for no deer, but a feller once made me out a bear, and threw some grass-seed in 'my face." Bird-shot delivered from modern breech-loading shot-guns was what Dicky termed "throwin' grass-seed."

"Yer a fine driver," called Jerry, with apt satire. "What you started, anyhow!"

As Dicky had walked rapidly, he nonchalantly mopped his perspiring forehead with a bandanna before replying.

"I think I've made a start to suit your highness," he said, bowing stiffly to the trapper. Then turning upon the others with a droll wink and a show of pride, "Boys, we've got a painter goin'."

"No!" ejaculated Lander, incredulously.

"Sartin as day. I seen him jump out of a hem-

lock myself after quittin' the swamp. If I'd had another second, I'd have cut loose at that."

"Are you sure?" asked Walter, as his friends crowded about, surprise and delight written on every eager face.

"There ain't no doubt of it, 'cause I went back to the swale and seen his footmarks—like that," and Dicky pressed his huge round fist into the trail with a vengeance.

"Well, boys, the dogs are nearing Glen Gorge," said Lander, impatiently. "Jerry, you and Dick direct us. There's no time to lose."

"We'd best get down there right spry," said Jerry, leading the way through the timber. "That's where I lost that animal twicet last Decemby." At the conclusion of these words the party broke into a run, which was kept up all the way to Mink Brook. Here Jerry left Grant, Harry, Paul, and Lander, directing the last to place the others as he thought best. All this while the dogs' fretful baying was a great stimulus to the exhausted lads, for the run along the mountain had been a hard one. Nobody doubted that the valiant "king of the ridge" was "up and going" before the canine trio, and going fast, too.

The remainder of the party splashed through the brook and climbed the ledges on the Bald Hill side as the hounds began to swing from Glen Gorge to

the outlet. Dicky proposed cutting them off, to which Jerry at once assented. The former took with him George, Donald, Jack, and Billy, which left Walter, Deane, and Arthur to accompany Jerry to the gorge. But before the parties separated the baying again ceased abruptly, for the lithe and beautiful animal, hard pressed, had again climbed a tree to escape Drum's fangs. This time the hounds, after a little circling, returned to the tree, in which they could see their victim plainly. After leaping up for some moments in vain, they squatted upon their haunches and bayed long and lustily, while the panther, lying against a lower limb, would thrust his lean head down to spit at the dogs.

"He's treed!" cried Dicky, exultingly. "Go a little keerful, young fellers, or he'll jump out." They broke into a trot, heading for the dogs, and separating as each chose a different path through the trees.

Jerry led his party at a full run for the gorge, directing Deane to stand on Panther Ledge, Arthur to watch both sides below the gorge proper, while he with Walter proposed to guard the upper end. Walter was stationed about a hundred yards from the log spanning the gorge, though on a shelf of rock considerably below it, which gave him a good view of the ledges on either side.

It must not be supposed that the occupants of the Wildcat Hole—Perry and McCaffrey—were not evincing a keen interest in the sounds of the chase above them, though of course each was affected very differently. Perry, who was resting as easily as possible under the circumstances, for his hands and feet were bound securely, hoped and prayed that the help so near would in some way reach him, that something would lead his friends into that out-of-the-way place. He recognized Crusty's voice, for he had often heard it on the island during the summer, and he thought the other must be Drum's—for Bones and Halden's dog bayed almost in unison. The hunters' shouts and the tumultuous howling of the dogs echoed in the cave louder and louder, and seemed to amuse the imperfurbable Kiddy very much. He started to look for his holster and pistol, having forgotten for a moment that Matt had taken these articles and Perry's repeating shot-gun, when he started to "check up" the grouse snares at noon. Kiddy did not allow Perry to see that he missed them, but, after assuring himself that the boy's cords were well knotted, crawled from the cave into the entrance niche, where he hoped to catch a glimpse of the young sportsmen.

About this time Dicky Halden, followed closely by Billy, began moving toward the rock oak in which the king had sought refuge from the dogs. But

before they got clear of the evergreen grove the animal must have scented them; for with one bound he shot from the tree and ran like a greyhound for the ledges, where he circled several times with marvellous rapidity. Billy raised his rifle on the second circle, and catching just a gleam of brown beyond the sights, pressed the trigger; but the panther raced on, clearing great boulders and dark yawning clefts like a trained chaser. Had he turned at bay and faced the hounds, they probably would not have attacked him; but mountain lions, and in fact all other varieties of the cat family, are notorious cowards, often fleeing before mere children unless very hungry, cornered, or opposed in front.

At the crack of Billy's rifle, Deane climbed to the shelf above. He could hear Jerry shouting some orders from the gorge, but was unable to make them out. The hounds seemed to be coming his way, however, and he raised the hammer of his rifle accordingly, and adjusted the weapon across a rock. Then followed a rapid volley of shots from George, Jack, and Donald, who were closing from another quarter. A long-drawn screech followed the last shot, after which Deane caught sight of the panther charging toward him at full gallop, and screaming in his stride. Just beyond bounded the three dogs, all closely bunched, — Drum first, Crusty second, and Bona-

parte last and roaring out his displeasure at every jump.

Deane raised his rifle and drew upon the narrow form. But he did not dare fire, for fear of hitting the pack behind. The fleeing animal then disappeared, having whipped off to the left in a trice, seemingly straight into the mountain! Drum and Crusty dashed up, snuffed the grass eagerly, backed off and strode around, growling angrily as little ridges of hair rose pugnaciously along their backbones. Not so with old Bones. He approached the spot cautiously, peered into the hole through which the panther had vanished, then bayed lustily as he bounded from sight with the other dogs close behind, their voices sounding fairly thunderous as they followed the scent farther in. Deane advanced slowly, and saw that the king had probably been driven home at last; for hard by the ledge top, well screened by luxuriant grasses and dense foliage, was a dark hole about two feet high, and nearly as wide. In the distance the gorge tree-tops rose above a level stretch of flat rock and waving meadow, while behind rose tier upon tier of rock-shelf for nearly two hundred feet.

"I'll stay here till they drive him back," thought Deane, as with an effort he steadied his wrists and knees.

"Bang!" "Crack!" sounded two shots—both

very quick, and from the ledge above. At the same time Bones, with a mighty "Wowoo-o!" burst from the cavernous rock through which the king had led them so rapidly. It was no wonder that both Harry and Grant, who had crossed the brook with Lander and Paul at the first firing, had missed, for the panther's lightning-like movements made it impossible to locate him with any exactness. The boys were running over the ledge when the animal popped in sight, and had really not steadied themselves before he had again vanished down a great dark cleft, cast in forbidding shadows. Harry rushed to the spot and peered in, but it was some seconds before his eyes could penetrate the gloom. By that time Grant had come to the edge of the ledge, over which he was looking in the hope of getting a shot, and the animal had reached the cave.

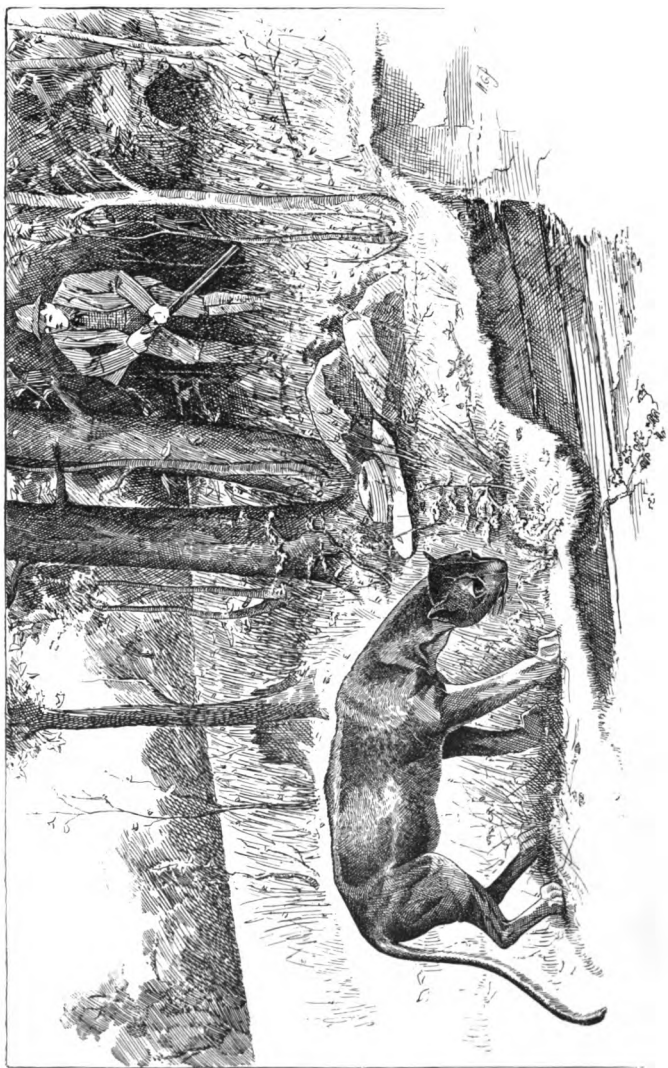
As soon as Kiddy heard the running and firing overhead, he made for the cleft and glanced up instinctively. Almost the first object that met his eyes was the invading panther, already starting down the narrow step for his old refuge. He was snarling, spitting, and screaming wickedly, the long hairs upon his nose twitching viciously. It was a wonder, lean as he was, that he did not fall from the oblique and treacherous step to the spring below. But he had made the passage before, and would make it again.

On he came boldly, with gleaming, tawny eyes levelled straight at the terror-stricken McCaffrey, who was swearing shamefully over the missing six-shooter. All at once the man's courage failed him. He turned upon Perry and severed the ropes with two strokes of his jack-knife. "This way," he muttered, shaking the boy roughly to his feet. Perry rubbed his wrists and stamped his feet in despair—they were very numb. Glancing toward the cleft, he beheld the lithe brown form crouching for a spring into the cave. When he turned again, Kiddy was just crawling from sight, and the boy followed him as quickly as possible.

"Follow me," hissed McCaffrey, fairly trembling with fear. He did not pause the fraction of a second, but grasped the limb and made for the tree-trunk, hand over hand. Just before Perry swung off, he heard Grant shouting to Deane from above.

"He's going to come out there, Deane," were the words. "Watch the wall!"

Deane did watch the wall, and was horrified to see a human form swing from the niche, and reaching the trunk, slide rapidly downward. Then came another, a familiar figure; which Deane recognized with a start that froze the blood within him—Perry Langdon! The second figure also reached the ground after a drop of ten feet from the lowest limb. Deane looked up and waved wildly to Grant.



DEANE COULD NOT MOVE A MUSCLE. Page 295.

"Don't fire, Grant!" he cried, in a high, dry voice.
"It's Perry!"

"It's who?" repeated Grant, fancying he could not have heard aright, for the dogs were howling dismally just behind him at the cleft.

"It's Perry!" shouted Deane. "Look out! there it goes!"

As he spoke the king sprang from the niche, and ran down the trunk with a scream and a sound of grating bark. McCaffrey fled along the ledge past Deane, dropping his sombrero on the way. Perry rushed in the opposite direction, but the panther followed Kiddy. Grant's rifle spoke when the animal had got within ten yards of Deane, at which the king turned to spit at the smoking spot where the bullet had struck, on the very margin of the ledge. He drew his lithe body into a muscular mass, and stood like a statue save for the restless lashing of the long tail. But Deane could not move a muscle.

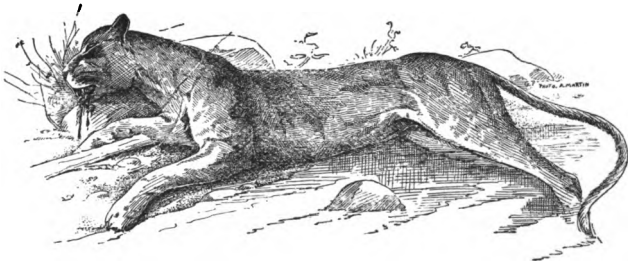
Grant kept waiting, expecting his room-mate to take the shot, which was a fatal mistake. Before either realized it, the panther had turned for the gorge, galloping very low and swiftly through the long grass. He made straight for the narrowest part of the gorge, bounding down the ledges from the meadow like a rubber ball. Walter saw him as he emerged from the woodland as if to cross the

log. The lad raised his "forty-five ninety," and took a quartering shot at the lean head just behind the jagged ear as the doughty old monarch rested his huge, quivering claw upon the pine. At the shot the beautiful creature faltered, missed his footing, and rolled from the log with a heart-stilling scream. Walter pressed the lever and gave him a second bullet through the right shoulder in mid-air. The king fell with a great splash into the run, but managed to crawl halfway out upon the sandy beech, where he rested quite easily with his head upon a little rock. The blood gushed freely from his throat, and there was a hideous light in the eyes, while the tail continued to gyrate until the body stiffened with a final convulsive twitching. It was his last move.

Walter was the first "in at the death"; then Arthur, who, with his kodak, took a snap-shot of the recumbent feline before any one had moved a hair. Several of the fellows, including George, Donald, and Jerry, were the next to rush in for the little chat that is often the best part of a successful hunt. All were loud in their praises of Walt's marksmanship, for they knew there was little danger of turning the Westerner's head in any such way; and besides, he really deserved it, for at a hundred yards it was work for any crack shot to be

proud of. But Jerry seemed to eye the fallen champion a trifle sadly. Perhaps he was recalling old times.

"Poor old feller!" he said laconically. "He died the death of a trooper's horse."





CHAPTER XVIII

THE GOLD VASE

AS soon as Deane had recovered from his stupefaction, he followed after Perry, whom he found standing at bay with a couple of stones about the size of ostrich eggs ready to hand. His second misadventure and the perilous escape from Kiddy and the enraged feline had left the lad in a state of collapse, though he had backed into a jagged nook, where he had defended himself instinctively. At sight of Deane with his rifle, however, Perry felt his nerve deserting him. He said nothing, but looked a world of eloquence at his club-mate. Seating himself on a log, he endeavored to hold himself together; but, in spite of his best effort, his knees would dance like corn in a popper.

"Who was that fellow that ran past me?" demanded Deane, who could not understand why his friend was at Glen Gorge.

"Kiddy McCaffrey," answered Perry, with a look of deep disgust. "Get him if you can."

"He's *here*?"

"Yes; he and another rogue. Where are the boys?"

"Here's Grant. Somebody just shot over near the gorge."

As he spoke, Grant and Harry came running up, both too excited to think clearly.

"What's the matter, Perry?" asked Grant, breathlessly. "Are you hurt?"

Perry set his jaw determinately. "We've got to hustle after that villain Kiddy," he said. "Where's Jerry?"

"Don't know. You don't look yourself, old man."

"I shouldn't think I would. But no more now," he concluded, as Grant seemed about to question him.

"Can you follow us to the gorge?"

"Certainly."

They started off at once, presently joining the party at the brook. Considerable excitement was caused by Perry's presence, for the story of his captivity and escape had spread like wildfire. Lander

and Paul next appeared, the latter looking very anxious, and finally Billy, Jack, and Dicky. Lander saw at once that something more serious than the hunt was occupying the boys' minds, and at Grant's urgent request immediately took charge. In reply to his questions, Perry gave a brief outline of his adventures since the day before; he told how Matt had approached him with the simple story of the wildcat, which had seemed very plausible at the time; how he had followed the rustic past the cleft, and had heard what he thought was the animal in the gloom below; without the slightest suspicion he had followed Matt down the rope and into the cave, where Kiddy awaited him with the lariat; having written the note to George, he had spent the afternoon in fretting and the night in abject misery; he had slept some in the morning, and early in the afternoon had been awakened by the baying of the pack. The rest is already known to the reader.

"Let's hunt the rascals down," proposed Grant, flushing wrathfully as he realized, not only the heinousness of the crime, but also how very near his own carefully nurtured plans had come to a lee shore.

"It ain't no use to do that," responded Dicky, as he assisted Jerry in lifting the king to higher ground. "I seen that feller makin' off like the painter was proddin' him ev'ry hop; that was twenty minutes

ago. If I'd knowed the kind of pranks he was give to, I'd have dusted him now, don't you fordoubt it. Better not waste no time lookin' for him in these here clefts."

"That's really the best way, boys," agreed Jimmy. "We can go and have a peep at the cave, while two can stand guard for Matt.

"I'll be one, Chesterfield," said Jerry, promptly.

"And me the other," added Dicky.

"Very well. Now string the king on a stick, and we'll start back."

Jerry whipped out a huge jack-knife, and presently, selecting a nice sapling of white oak, cut and trimmed it into a neat pole. The panther's fore and hind feet were then lashed securely together, and the sapling run between the legs, Dicky and Jerry shouldering the ends. The old fellow swung jauntily to the spring of the pole, his head and tail hanging below the body, which lent a certain limp grace to the whole form. It was now seen that the fore claws were larger and altogether more powerful than the hind ones. This is true of the cat family generally. The head, too, was very full and hard, the fangs were long and very sharp. Considering the time of year, the pelage was fairly thick and lustrous.

"How much will he weigh?" asked Lander, before they started back.

"Over a hundred," responded Jerry, hunching his shoulder to test the pressure of the sapling. "He's a right smart bigger'n the mate we killed two year ago."

"I think so."

The boys seemed very jubilant over the termination of the chase, though the islanders were clearly anxious to enter the cave at once. This contact with petty outlaws did not unduly excite the Deer Lodgers, but even they were very curious as well as firmly resolved to do their utmost to effect the capture of Kiddy McCaffrey, on whom they now looked as a very mean criminal, if such a distinction can be made in connection with this class of men. One and all realized how hard it must have been for Perry to have written his brother as he did, and they secretly admired him for it as boys will ever admire quiet courage and self-denial. Perry said little. He endeavored to forget the repellent features of the vacation, which thus far seemed to have fallen mostly to his lot. But he was of too cheery a nature to grumble, and walked along with George and Walter, discussing the latter's remarkable shots as though the hunt were the only subject worth mentioning.

When they reached the ledge, Perry directed Grant, who climbed the pine and entered the niche by way of the horizontal limb. It was no easy task,

possessing a decided element of danger ; but the lad accomplished the feat in safety, and threw out the rope. The party then went round to the ledge above, where Perry adjusted the rope as Matt had done.

"You slide down first, Billy," said Deane ; "you're used to it."

Billy grasped the ropes and let himself down without mishap. The others followed at intervals, all but Perry, Dicky, and Jerry entering the cave within a short while. The mountaineers, having secreted the panther and tied the dogs, lingered about the gorge in the hope of cornering Matt on his return.

It is not surprising that under the circumstances the boys found the cave a most congenial spot. The turkey gobbler and nearly a dozen grouse still hung in a cool recess, ready for Saturday's market ; but Matt had delayed the sale too long. It was decided to appropriate the game for good and sufficient reasons, and it was accordingly made ready for conveyance to the camps. Though a number of the fellows looked over the wall to the spring, no one chanced to notice Jack's bait-box, probably because it had become so water-soaked that it showed quite dark, like the water. So the little mystery remained unsolved till evening.

The party spent nearly an hour enjoying the novelty of the cave, though Lander had returned to

the ledge top in the meantime for a little chat with Perry, during which the boy had risen even beyond the man's high estimate. Jimmy had received a paper from Grant describing the lad's river adventure, which he had read with a tingling of the blood. He now saw that Perry was indeed the manly chap the reporter had pictured him, but feared that McCaffrey's treachery might have so handicapped him that he would be unable to do himself justice on Saturday.

"If I were you, my boy, I'd get right back to camp for a good rest. I've rowed a bit myself, and realize what this break in your training has cost you," said Lander, after they had conversed awhile.

"I know that," replied Perry, yawning and stretching his arms against a low limb. "The fact is, I'm so glad to get out of that burrow that I've not thought of another thing. I don't like to take mean advantages, but if I had a chance to use 'a brick in a stocking' on that fellow, McCaffrey, I think I'd be tempted to do it, though he did cut me loose when the panther came down the rocks."

Lander laughed. "I wouldn't blame you," said he. "Matt Flint is merely an accomplice, isn't he?"

"Yes, and at times he seems a little 'off.' Kiddy has simply made a tool of him."

"Well, the boys can bring the things up and

return when they get ready. What do you say to going back with me now?"

"I'd like to very much."

Lander reëntered the cave and saw Grant, who cordially agreed to the proposition. Perry and he then left, crossing Mink Brook at the outlet and taking the beach path back. When they had gone about a mile, Perry pointed to a shell over by the chosen course along the Bald Hill ledges.

"That's Gene Marshall," said he, "and he's no end of a good oarsman. Candidly, he's the chap I'm most afraid of."

"That's a nice stroke," returned Lander, gazing critically toward the west shore. "How do you feel yourself?"

"Oh, pretty well; but I'm stiff and sore. I'd like to do a short mile slowly before I turn in — it would limber me up, I think."

"Very well, I see no objections to that, only I wouldn't overdo."

Now, Eugene had really been quite anxious over the firing at Glen Gorge, and had taken to his shell as a means of relieving this anxiety. But he kept his eyes almost continually on the east shore, and toward evening was rather puzzled on seeing two figures making along the willows. He thought it quite strange that but one should carry a gun; and he

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thought he recognized, even at that distance, the smaller one. In his desire to quiet his rising fears, he spurred more than a quarter-mile across the lake before he looked again. Still he was not sure, and continued to row farther in. Presently he turned sharply and scrutinized the pedestrians, with a cry he could not control. One of the two was Perry Langdon! There was no mistaking that walk.

"Oh, what have I done!" moaned Eugene, almost capsizing the shell as he turned in his seat. He lowered the blades for a stroke, then raised them and backed water. It seemed that every drop of blood in his body rushed to his heart and oozed away, leaving it very cold and heavy in his breast. Little beads of perspiration formed themselves on his forehead, cheeks, neck, hands, and arms. He drove the shell forward — once; again, with an effort, twice; and was soon in a broken stroke, neither feathering nor attempting to preserve his style in any way — in fact, he even splashed occasionally.

He did not return to the channel until Lander and Perry had crossed to the island. Then he rowed in very quickly and threw himself upon the nearest cot with a pitiful sob. He was still lying there when Harry and Walter, carrying the prize between them, emerged from the woodland with a glad whoop. Eugene bounded to his feet and glanced down the

beach at the merry throng. He could see the panther, the wild gobbler, the string of grouse; the boys seemed to be covered with game and radiant smiles. How he wished he could have smiled with them! But he told himself he was a long way from that.

He scanned the approaching group for signs of the inevitable accusation; he wondered how he should reply, if, indeed, he should reply at all; he wondered how his voice would sound. But now Arthur was hailing him, and he took hope at the words.

"You missed it, Gene!" he cried, all in a breath, bounding in upon his club-mate; "biggest time of your life. Walt shot the panther after a bully chase, but that isn't *all*. The cat tried to lead the dogs through a cave where that bandit McCaffrey was hiding Perry Langdon. But say! he lost his nerve and cut Perry loose — panther and all came tumbling down the tree like sixty! Deane Cumnor had a great chance — got rattled and didn't shoot. Walt killed it on the run."

"What became of the men — the man?" asked Eugene, faintly.

"Dug out! Dicky Halden said he was going twenty miles an hour when he passed him."

"Where's Jerry?"

"Oh, he and Dicky are hunting for McCaffrey and Matt Flint."

"They'll not get th — I mean, those are the faces we saw in the rocks. Don't you think so?"

"There's no doubt of it. But we never could have found them. You have to go through a hole way up in the wall."

"Do you?" was Gene's husky comment, as he began to rub down.

At this moment Paul stuck his head in at the door.

"Hello, old man!" he said, addressing his cousin.

"They've got Matt Flint. Hurry up out."

"Where?" demanded Eugene, with a stagger.

"Down the beach. You'll miss the fun if you don't rush."

Arthur followed Paul, Eugene returning to the window. He saw that Jerry and Dicky were walking on either side of Matt, with the dogs heeling. The fellows had dropped their game and were running to meet them.

"This here rapscallion needs lookin' over," said Jerry, as Grant joined him. "He's tryin' to lay the blame of his doin's on we-uns."

"Well, bring him up to camp," responded Grant, who had always remembered Matt as the cause of his heartrending flight from the quarrymen the previous autumn. "We'll see that justice is done."

"Ye will that," said Matt, glancing timidly at Halden, who kept thrusting his spike beard unpleasantly close to the top-hand's face. "Ye can deliver up my sparkler, Jerry Quick."

"Like enough," said Jerry, dryly. "And the guns along with it, Matthew?"

"They be mine, and ye'll make yerself liable."

"I wouldn't like to do that, Matthew," answered Jerry, with a bland smile. "But it sticks in my cranium that I've seen this here scatter-gun afore."

They walked slowly up the beach, which gave Lander and Perry time to cross from the island to see the fun. Dicky at once escorted Matt to the veranda, upon the rail of which the boys took up their places for the impromptu trial — all but Eugene, who already felt tainted with the impending disgrace, though he determined to dodge it if possible.

"Judge! judge!" suggested Deane. "I propose Mr. Lander."

"I second him," cried Harry.

"All in favor say 'I!'"

"Carried," concluded Grant, as the boys responded unanimously.

"Bring the prisoner before me," began Lander, gravely. "Now, Matthew," he continued, as Jerry planted a camp-chair for the judge a little distance from the veranda, "I want to ask you a question:

Do you know what you have been guilty of in taking and holding this young man against his will?" He placed his hand on Perry's arm.

"Not fer certain," answered Matt, sullenly.

"Do you want me to tell you?"

"Don't mind hearin' ye."

"You have been guilty of kidnapping, the maximum penalty for which in many states is twenty years' imprisonment at hard labor. It is also your second crime within a year, is it not?"

Matt hesitated, but finally admitted the fact.

"We do not propose to make this a court of justice, nor do we believe you are more to blame than your unscrupulous comrade. Still, with all your simplicity, you appear to possess criminal instincts to a marked degree. This man McCaffrey, however, is no doubt to blame for your present sorry plight. What was his motive in attempting a second capture of the lad who, by a remarkable display of courage, had saved his friend from an ignominious death but two months before? It seems to me the very height of ingratitude."

Lander spoke rapidly, for he was thoroughly incensed; and though Matt failed to comprehend every word, he understood the question readily enough.

"He was paid fer it," he grinned sheepishly.

"He was paid fer it, like I told Jerry Quick was the case."

"You mean he hoped to blackmail the boy's parents out of a ransom, don't you?" questioned the judge.

"I don't mean no such thing," responded Matt, who was not so dull that he couldn't see a trump card. "Ye know right well ye shore boys done paid fer it."

"It's not so!" cried Harry, exasperated beyond measure at the man's effrontery. "Show us the fellow who paid you, if you can."

"That's fair," agreed the judge, who understood Harry's feelings exactly. "Point him out."

Matt slowly raised his head and scanned the boys in a shamefaced sort of way. "He ain't here," he said simply, "and ye know he ain't."

"I thought not," replied Harry, his lip curling. "Is any one absent?"

"Yes," said Paul, quickly. "Eugene is inside."

"Call him out," said Lander.

Paul went to the door. "Come here and see this man, Gene," he called, stepping in. "He's trying to lie out of it."

Eugene was nearly dressed. He followed Paul with uncertain steps to the threshold, pretending to adjust his belt, which of course kept his head lowered.

"That's the sonny!" exclaimed Matt, gleefully, as soon as he caught sight of Gene's blanched face. "He give Kidder fifty dollars and more."

"I admire your brass," boldly retorted Eugene, looking Matt hard in the eyes. "I never saw you before, and I never saw this Kidder. Your stories, like yourself, are a trifle airy."

"Geewhillikens!" ejaculated Matt, as the boys laughed at his expense. "Do ye mean to say ye didn't pay us fer the keepin' of the big trout Kidder and me took from Hawk's Nest along with the bait-box?"

"I mean to say just that," replied Eugene, icily.

"And do ye mean to say ye didn't buy Kidder to hold the Langdon sonny from Wednesday to Friday 'cause ye knowed he could strip ye fer that gold mug ye was speakin' about?"

"Such talk is utterly ridiculous, and an insult to the club!" cried Eugene, appealing to Harry. "I demand an apology."

"Silence!" commanded the judge, rapping smartly upon the chair. "Let's hear Matthew out."

"That's it. I can set ye straight," continued Matt, excitedly. "He give us stuff all summer fer keepin' the big trout, 'cause he didn't ketch it, an' wanted to have it forgot before he brung it up to camp."

"That's my fish!" interrupted George. "Where is it now?"

"In the cave spring," responded the rustic, who felt the tide turning. "He said it would give him a prize, and could we hold the Langdon sonny till Saturday, to make him break trainin', he said, he'd —"

"It's a lie!" screamed Eugene, white with rage. He turned on the threshold and reeled into the room, where he fell heavily, at full length. Paul rushed after, Harry following him; for a little the others seemed too dumfounded to move.

"He has fainted," said Paul, very huskily, as the boys crowded about. "Get some water."

Harry hurried to the pantry, quickly returning with a dipperful.

"We had better clear the room," advised Deane, as Lander threw open the windows.

"Yes, let's go over, fellows," continued Grant, who was much distressed. "Jerry, you and Dick bring Flint over."

The islanders, including the astonished judge, left in silence at once. Matt was carried over in the skiff a little later, and was lashed securely to a small tree in the thickest part of the hickory grove, where he remained till dark. Little or nothing was said at supper, everybody seemingly being occupied with his

own thoughts. It was, in fact, a melancholy repast. The evening swim was dispensed with, too, for at eight o'clock Walter and Harry, both looking worried and upset, called at the shooting-box to see Lander and Grant. Perry was asked to remain, but the others quietly withdrew.

It was never known just what happened at that eventful meeting, but at its conclusion it was pretty generally understood that Eugene would be allowed to take part in the race. All Harry would say was that he believed his club-mate guilty, and that his conduct merited immediate expulsion from the association. But, as Walter explained, the summer had been far too enjoyable to end so unsatisfactorily to all concerned. Eugene, he said, would not commit himself, but appeared obviously unstrung. The Deer Lodgers sincerely trusted that Perry would recover from his untoward confinement, and do himself full justice. They then shook hands and left on the best of terms.

When the boys reached camp again, Eugene was quite willing to admit the facts, which he did in a half-hearted way, venturing that his friends were making a mountain out of a mole-hill. He went on to say that he didn't expect to row in the race, that he didn't think he would. Harry was too spirited to ask any favors under the circumstances, and said

good evening curtly enough. You can guess how the culprit spent the night.

Visitors for the regatta began to arrive Friday morning, when the four oarsmen were out for their final spin, Eugene having wisely concluded to stand by his colors. To be sure, the race did not now interest him a whit, but he knew that a refusal to row would cause comment and might lead to an investigation which would be almost certain to terminate unpleasantly, besides further incurring the displeasure of his club-mates.

It was a very busy day. Tim Anderson brought his first load from the Eddy at ten o'clock, and, by arrangement with Grant, took the very repentant and badly frightened captive back with him. Matt was overjoyed at his release and at the recovery of the "sparkler," which Jerry was good enough to return. The rustic made all sorts of promises before joining the quarry gang, and they were made in good faith, too, and for an extended period were well kept. The six-shooter and sombrero were held by the association pending Kiddy's capture.

George, Donald, and Jack visited the cave together before noon. They were no longer "on the outs," having forgotten their disagreement in other things. The trout was brought up and found to be in good health. It was lowered from the niche in a pail, and

the boys carried it to the outlet, where they entered their canoe. Before they had gone far, however, George noticed that the fish was fast failing, though he changed the water continually. It was very cramped in its close quarters.

"I think I'll let this fellow go," was his startling announcement, as he shook the pail to rally the prize. "He hasn't had any too good a time this summer, and I don't like to make it any worse. Besides," smiling at Jack, "he's made trouble enough already."

Donald flushed with pleasure, for he realized that such a move would very probably result in his receiving the angling medal, as he still led in this contest with his two-pounder.

"Don't do that, George," he advised sincerely. "You've earned the prize, and ought to have it. Carry it into camp; I would, and be glad of the chance. It will make people's eyes stick out, I tell you."

But George's mind was made up. He slowly submerged the pail until the trout began to move its fins, at which he gently drew the receptacle toward him. This left the fish at liberty on the surface of the lake, but a second or two elapsed before it seemed to realize the fact. Then, with a mighty splash and a quiver, it shot away from shore, a mere gleam of pink and green. Whether or not it is at present bat-

ting with the bellicose members of the pickerel, perch, carp, cat- and sun-fish families for the deep-water



"CARRY IT INTO CAMP," ADVISED DONALD.

championship, or has long since returned to the pool at Hawk's Nest, I am unable to say, but am rather inclined to the latter theory.

A very pleasant surprise awaited the boys on their return. General Burton and party had arrived during their absence, together with a score of the lads' schoolmates, many mountaineers, and quarrymen. The general's party included Grant's mother, Mrs. Jerome Burton, and his sisters, Elsie and Gertrude, Mrs. Langdon and Margaret, Miss Virgie Martin, Uncle John Hillman and his niece, Miss Bessie, Walt's sister, and Paul's little brother, Cary. Mr. Langdon and Mr. and Mrs. Martin were expected on the morrow.

There was plenty for the visitors to see and do. The mountaineers discussed the panther with much interest, as in fact did everybody present, though for a time the young girls refused to approach the spot. He was hung by his hind legs from a limb hard by the shore camp, and was measured. The distance from the tip of the nose to the tip of the tail was ninety-three inches; from the nose to the base of the tail, fifty-three inches; space between the tips of the ears, eleven inches; girth around breast, forty-four inches—a truly remarkable beast. There were no scales about, and as a consequence the animal was never weighed, though such good judges as Jerry and Dick guessed “he'd go a hundred and a quarter.” Here the old fellow remained on exhibition all the following day, where he was viewed with delight by

the throngs from Milford and other resorts along the Delaware. The hounds and setters were tied in their kennels close by, which, when the boys had stacked their rifles against the tree-trunk, completed a little picture worth going far to see.

You may well believe that Grant had plenty to do without considering the approaching race. As Saturday morning broke clear and still, he was up early, giving directions to Jimmy Lander, his mother and sisters, and in fact everybody who seemed disposed to assist in the preparation of the little banquet. The gobbler and grouse had been picked the night before, and were now prepared for the oven under Lander's critical eye. George and Donald brought in a fine mess of trout early in the day, while Hammie Tuttle sent up a quarter of venison with some quarrymen from the Eddy. Hammie had "cornered" a two-prong buck. Good-fellowship prevailed, though not a few exasperating mistakes occurred through the day. Arthur and Paul further augmented the larder with a fine pail of blueberries, while Walter, Jerry, and Dick visited the well-known pickerel grounds off the lily bar by Standing Rock. By ten o'clock Grant felt that he had earned a little rest, and forthwith joined Perry in the cool shade of the pines at the far end of the island.

"The fellows are keeping things quiet, as they

promised," began Grant. "I know it would knock all the fun out of these last days to have certain facts get abroad."

"I think so too," answered Perry, reflectively. "I hope the fellows will drop it forever."

There was a little pause as Grant marked a half-circle on the needles with his stick.

"We've got to get this race, Perry," he said seriously. "The panther has gone to Deer Lodge."

"That was right. Walt earned him fairly."

"There's no doubt of it. That gives them three events to our two, though. How do you feel?"

"As well as ever. And you?"

"A little nervous; there's such a crowd here."

"Oh, that's nothing. We'll stay pretty well together till the last half-mile."

"And then you'll leave us," laughed Grant. "Well, I wish you success. Grandpop's placed the cup on exhibition, and I think it's a little beauty."

"It is, indeed. But you fellows musn't put so much confidence in me. I've done nothing to warrant it," concluded Perry, modestly.

The judges were chosen just before luncheon, which was served to all, for the race was scheduled for two o'clock. Jimmy Lander was selected as starter, General Burton as referee, to accompany the racers in the launch, and Professor Terrill of the

academy as judge at the finish. Many of the spectators began to move to the ledges at one o'clock, though a large number of the younger men signified their intention of running with the boats, as is the common custom at the English races. It is quite safe to say that by two o'clock there were between three and four hundred people on the west shore alone, and more were steadily arriving.

Hammie Tuttle, having reached the lake at noon with a generous basket of rosettes and ribbons, now did a thriving business. Everybody bought of him. Even the mountaineers seemed to realize that they should indulge in this little extravagance, and purchased scarlet and white or brown and blue streamers as their fancy dictated. They smoked almost continuously, and it was interesting to note that each pipe corresponded exactly with the general character of the smoker's face—and they were widely divergent. Danny Burns was fairly covered with scarlet and white, and that is saying a great deal. He and his friends had cast their fortunes with Grant and



MOUNTAINEERS

Squirrel Island for old association's sake, and had privately rehearsed a yell that was nearly as unintelligible as any modern college cry.

Not a few of our friends decided to run with the boats, though the majority remained with the party on the ledges, about a hundred yards from Professor Terrill's boat. Here also were gathered over two hundred visitors, the others being strung along the rocks and beach to the starting-point. As the contestants were nearly an hour late in entering their shells, the spectators had ample time for speculation on the race. Programmes had been issued by which those unfamiliar with the summer's events were soon set right. The evening's entertainment was also outlined, and invitations extended to all.

At about a quarter to three the general's launch left the island jetty with a shrill whistle and pointed her dainty prow for the Red Brook buoys, at which Perry and Grant came down the steps and entered their shells. Grant wore a white rowing shirt and scarlet cap, while Perry had chosen a scarlet shirt and cap of the same color. They slowly drew away from the deserted island, Grant looking a bit flushed, but resolute for all that. Perry appeared quite himself. Within five minutes Harry and Eugene were following leisurely, with long, slow strokes. Eugene's face was pale and drawn, like one who has not slept

well. Otherwise he looked in superb condition, though perhaps trained a trifle light. Harry was the only one of the four who was able to "crack a smile."

Something seemed to amuse him greatly, for he grinned all the way to the starter; possibly he was wondering what would be said and done should the event go to Eugene.

Billy Clarkson, who was standing on a rock at the finish with his field glasses levelled at the distant oarsmen, kept the group about him very well informed both before the start and throughout the race.

"They're nearing the starter, now," he said, as Grant began to swing his shell at the buoys. "The boys are in fine fettle, I tell you. Who's your favorite, Miss Bessie, if it's a fair question?"

Miss Bessie glanced from under her brother's sombrero, which she had donned for the occasion. "Oh, I hope Perry will win," she said, sweetly. "Don't you?"

"Of course I do — Perry or Grant. Here, take this flag and wave it as they come down — wave it hard, mind you."



FROM TOWN

"Tut, tut!" protested Uncle John, as Bessie reached for the little ensign; "you're deserting your colors. What do you say, Miss Virgie? for Harry, of course?"

"I didn't say," replied the girl with a laugh. "You're too inquisitive, Uncle John."

"I'm for cousin Gene!" cried little Cary, stoutly. "See that?" and the youngster proudly displayed a large rosette upon his jacket.

"That's right, my boy!" responded the sun-burned rancher, heartily. "Come, we'll move on a bit."

"You'd better hurry," advised Billy; "they're lining up."

By this time the four shells had come up with the starter, who was placing them as the positions had been drawn: Harry on the shore side, Perry next, then Eugene, with Grant on the extreme outside. There was very little choice, however, for the course stretched away for two full miles as smooth as glass. Toward the centre of the lake, to be sure, there was a dimpling of the surface caused by a light westerly wind, but under the lee of Bald Hill not the faintest ripple could be noted.

"Are you ready?" cried the starter, in stentorian tones, when the sharp prows were at last in line. The boys nodded as the launch gave forth a piercing

shriek to inform the expectant throng that the word was about to be given.

"Then GO!"

At the first sound Harry dropped his blades and was the first to take water. The shell shot away from the line like a thing of life, a tiny ribbon of foam showing white in front. At the same instant a mighty shout went up from the runners on shore.

"They're off!" cried Billy from his perch. "Hear those fellows yell!"

"Who's in front?" asked Arthur, nervously, and "Who's leading?" shouted somebody behind him.

"Can't tell yet. They're all rowing nicely. The man on the inside looks to be spurting."

"That's Harry," said Virgie. "He told me he had drawn the inside position."

"Have a look through these," suggested Billy, who began to realize that others were interested besides himself. "Permit me to adjust them."

"Oh, I can do it," replied the young girl, taking the glasses. She raised them at once and saw the four gleaming shells very plainly, the four backs lunging to the strokes, the bright flash of the cedar blades. "I can't tell who's in front," she concluded, passing the glasses to Uncle John, who still hovered near. "Can you?"

"It looks like Harry," answered Uncle John, be-

fore he had focussed the instrument. "Good luck to him."

And now, from far down the beach, came the dull clamor of men's voices, for the runners had started with the boats. There were nearly a hundred of them, of every description, some intent on cheering their favorite, and some, not so partial, willing to cheer the best man. Seldom, I think, has a more diversified gathering been seen; there was the trim college man in white flannel, running shoulder to shoulder with a grimy railroader, who had not taken time to change his dress at the Port Jervis yards after leaving his engine, for fear of missing the race; and there were a dozen Andover lads in golf suits, running nimbly in front and shouting in chorus, "Martin, Harry Martin! hang to it, Harry!" for Harry was leading by two lengths at the first half-mile, which was covered in three minutes and thirty-six seconds, and as a consequence his classmates seemed quite willing to make him their choice. For the first mile nine out of every ten runners simply emitted an occasional shout or discharged a pistol in air in order to contribute a share to the tumultuous noise. Farmers, hotel clerks, quarrymen, bankers, country storekeepers, and city magistrates, all out for a holiday, raced on together, pushing and shoving, laughing and shouting, until those on the ledges began to fear they

would be snowed under. Halden and O'Reilly were easily the largest of the runners, showing above the moving line like giant pines on a ridge of scrub oaks.

At the three-quarter buoy Grant had gained a length on Harry, but Eugene and Perry had dropped away a like distance. As the runners were still a furlong before the boats, they having had the best of the start, it looked from their position as if the leaders were about even. It seemed, too, that Grant's blade work and general form were very good, and though Harry was rowing two more strokes to the minute, the islander held his own with little effort. Eugene was indulging himself in a long, full sweep, bending to the oars and shooting up and down the limit of the sliding seat with an ease and grace that was good to see. Perry's stroke was quite different, being a trifle shorter and rather more choppy, but quite as frictionless as his rival's; his boat, too, got through the water every bit as fast.

At the end of the first mile, rowed in seven minutes and ten seconds, Grant led by two open lengths. Harry was second, with the prow of Perry's shell lapped on the stern of his. Eugene was last, half a length away. Entering on the second mile, Grant thought to slip away from his opponents, and immediately sent his stroke up three more to the minute, rowing about thirty-five. His shell shot still farther

into the lead, at which Mike O'Reilly, staunchly supported by Si Phipps, bellowed forth: "Burton wins! Burton wins!" Others took up the cry, for somehow it was accompanied with a sense of victory, all shouting at once: "Grant Burton all the way! Grant Burton! Squirrel Island!"

"How's that?" asked Uncle John, for the mighty cheer had been carried clear to the cliffs. "Who's first?"

"They're shouting for Grant," answered Billy, excitedly. "Houp-la! What's the matter with Squirrel Island?"

"Who's second?"

"Harry, and he's spurting again. Perry and Marshall are dropping back."

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Virginia, waving her colors. "Elsie, Grant will win!"

"And where is Perry?" asked Margaret, anxiously. "Can you see, Mr. Clarkson?"

"I think he's last," responded Billy, honestly. "Eugene is coming fast."

"It's all right," assured George, who was seated on a rock by his mother's side. "They've got a whole mile to go yet."

"But they're shouting for Marshall," pursued Uncle John. "Hear that!"

The old gentleman was right. Eugene had taken

alarm at the cries for Grant, and had quickened his stroke at once. He soon overhauled and passed Harry, who was unable to make his boat travel with the leaders. Just before the mile-and-a-half buoy was reached, Eugene sent the prow of his shell up to Grant's oar-lock. This was hailed by a perfect storm of applause from the ledges, upon which the runners were already swarming, "Deer Lodge! Deer Lodge! Marshall has him! Burton's beat! well rowed, Marshall! hang to it, brownie!" were characteristic cries. Those in the trailing launch caught the time as Grant's shell shimmered past the buoy, — ten minutes forty-two seconds, — excellent time for schoolboys at the distance. The racers were less than half a mile from the party on the ledges, from which point all could be plainly seen. Perry was about a length behind Harry, who was a couple of lengths behind Grant and Eugene. The two leaders were now on even terms, and rowing splendidly.

"Perry is still last," said George, with a look at Donald that recalled to both the awful inharmony of the events at Glen Gorge. "It's between Grant and Eugene, mother."

"Then we must cheer for Grant," said Mrs. Langdon, loyally. "Is that he farthest out?"

"Yes, but Eugene's going ahead. Eugene will win. There! he's a half-length in front."

But his voice was drowned in the cheers for Gene Marshall. "Marshall wins! Deer Lodge in a walk! You've got him, Gene!" were the shouts.

"Grant's not beaten!" cried Billy, flourishing a scarlet streamer. "Stand fast, Grant Burton! stand fast!"

"Eugene will beat him out," maintained Uncle John, more excited than he had been for years. "Burton doesn't gain a yard."

"Look there!" yelled Billy, dancing about on the rock. "Perry is spurting! Oh, you, Perry Langdon!"

"Yes, Perry's gaining!" ejaculated Donald, hurling his cap into the air with a wild whoop. "He's passed Harry, and is rowing grandly. Come on, you, Perry!"

The shells shot by the seventh buoy and entered the last quarter,—the time was twelve minutes twenty-nine seconds,—with Eugene leading Grant by nearly a boat-length. Perry was not sixty feet back, and coming very fast. Harry had rowed his race too soon, and was now steadily losing ground, though sculling with a grim determination that won encouraging bursts of applause.

Eugene, it will be seen, was really in the best position. With Grant on his right and Perry at his left, with a commanding lead over the lad he most feared, and with a clear course ahead and but a

quarter-mile to go, it was no wonder he rowed like one possessed. He lunged forward, and drove the blades again and again through the limpid waters with faultless regularity and precision; but he could not increase his lead over Perry the fraction of an inch. Grant made a supreme effort to spurt also, but he merely held his pace, which gradually brought him even with his club-mate, whose long, powerful stroke was fast closing the open water to Eugene's shell. The cheering that greeted this effort lingered long in the boy's ears, a happy memory.

"See! Perry will win!" shouted George, as Margaret and Bessie climbed upon the boulder with Billy. "Squirrel Island! scarlet and white!"

And now the throng was upon them, yelling itself hoarse. "Go it, Langdon! You'll beat him, Gene! two hundred yards to go! Deer Lodge! brown and blue wins! Squirrel Island! Marshall all the way! nothing but Marshall!" And so they shouted, shooting their pistols in air and blowing their horns the while.

And Perry quickened his stroke with a mighty effort, as did Eugene; but the most strength was behind the former's. Foot by foot the gap was decreased until, at ninety yards from the judge's boat, Perry drove the prow of his shell beyond the stern of the rival boat. There it hung for two sharp,

desperate strokes, while the cries from shore subsided expectantly. Then, with several dogged lunges, Perry was gaining resolutely again, and gained till the boats were on even terms, forty yards from the line. It was like a bolt from the blue.

"Who wins now?" screamed the Crooked Trail youth, almost tumbling from the rock in his excitement and joy. "Perry Langdon! Perry Langdon by a length! Oh, you, Perry!" And two hundred voices joined in the enthusiastic cheering that arose as the gallant lad continued to forge ahead on sheer courage, shooting over the line a scant length before Eugene, amid a deafening din. Grant finished third, two lengths away, beating Harry nearly six lengths. The official time was fourteen minutes and twelve seconds.

"Perry has won," said George, calmly enough under the circumstances. "The kodak fiends are upon them already."

"That was a noble effort," commented Uncle John, turning to Mrs. Langdon. "Madam, I congratulate you most heartily, most sincerely. It was a grand finish, a great race."

Mrs. Langdon flushed with pleasure, but before she could reply little Cary burst into tears. "Cousin Gene has lost," he cried, his knuckles in his eye. "I want to go home."

"You don't want to do anything of the kind," disagreed the jolly rancher, raising the youngster upon his broad shoulder. "See! they're going to shake hands."

Perry had backed water on bringing his shell to a stop, and was now but a few feet from his rival.



PERRY IN HIS SHELL

Both were blowing hard. "Let me offer you my hand," said Perry, as the boats came abreast. "Let us forget and forgive, Eugene. What do you say?"

At the words, spoken very low, Eugene's face crimsoned. "It's mighty good of you," he replied, so huskily that Perry scarcely recognized the voice.

"I've been a mean scamp, and I'm sorry for it." At this Perry leaned over and extended both hands, which the other took and wrung in silence, while cheer upon cheer arose from the cliff.

"Stay and have your picture 'took,'" continued the victor, more lightly, as Arthur neared them in his canoe. But Eugene made for the launch, into which Harry and Grant were already climbing.

"Strike a pose!" commanded Arthur, as he focussed the camera. "Where's your cap?"

"Blew off," laughed Perry, dipping his oars for a stroke, and raising his eyes to the instrument.

"Flick!" Arthur had pressed the button.

Perry then followed Eugene, notwithstanding the cries from a dozen kodak fiends, who were late in reaching the spot. He was helped into the launch amid much merriment, the little vessel heading for the island almost at once.

Before five o'clock probably two-thirds of the visitors had left the lake, highly pleased with their little outing. Those remaining congregated for the most part on the island, where they viewed the gold vase and the raising of the banner on Crown Point for the last time with much interest. Time was not allowed to drag. A friendly wrestling match between the giants Halden and O'Reilly, proposed and arranged by Jimmy Lander, next took place, and

was finally declared in favor of Dicky by two falls to one.

Dicky, much elated, stroked his spiked beard affectionately and forthwith challenged Jerry, who was not slow in accepting his friend's "bluff." These hardy mountaineers strove for twenty minutes before the first fall occurred. At this point Dicky stepped into a boggy spot and missed his footing. Jerry was quick to take advantage of the little mishap, for, getting his leg well behind the reeling giant, he sent him to the turf in a twinkling, spike beard and all. Before Halden could turn upon his breast, Jerry had touched two shoulders to earth, and was away to the woods, wisely determined to rest on his laurels.

"It ain't no fair," grumbled Dicky, regaining his feet with an effort. "Come back, you old codger, and have another!" But Jerry said nay.

Just before sunset there was a good deal of boating. It was too calm for sailing, and as a consequence the canoes were in great demand. Those who were lucky enough to control a canoe, and at the same time enjoy the society of a pretty girl, were considered very lucky indeed. Grant was one of these. He was paddling Virgie around the island, keeping well among the cool green shadows along shore. Whenever the boat passed beneath an arch

of tinted foliage, the girl would reach up and break off a spray of the pretty leaves.

"That's a cheerful reminder of autumn," said Grant, as a particularly ruddy leaf was gathered. "Well, I, for one, have had a thoroughly good time."

"And so have all the boys. It's too bad there should have been any annoyance here at the lake, isn't it?"

"What do you know about it?" asked Grant, pausing in his stroke as a couple of dark swallows rushed swiftly past.

The young girl looked away, a little sadly, thought Grant.

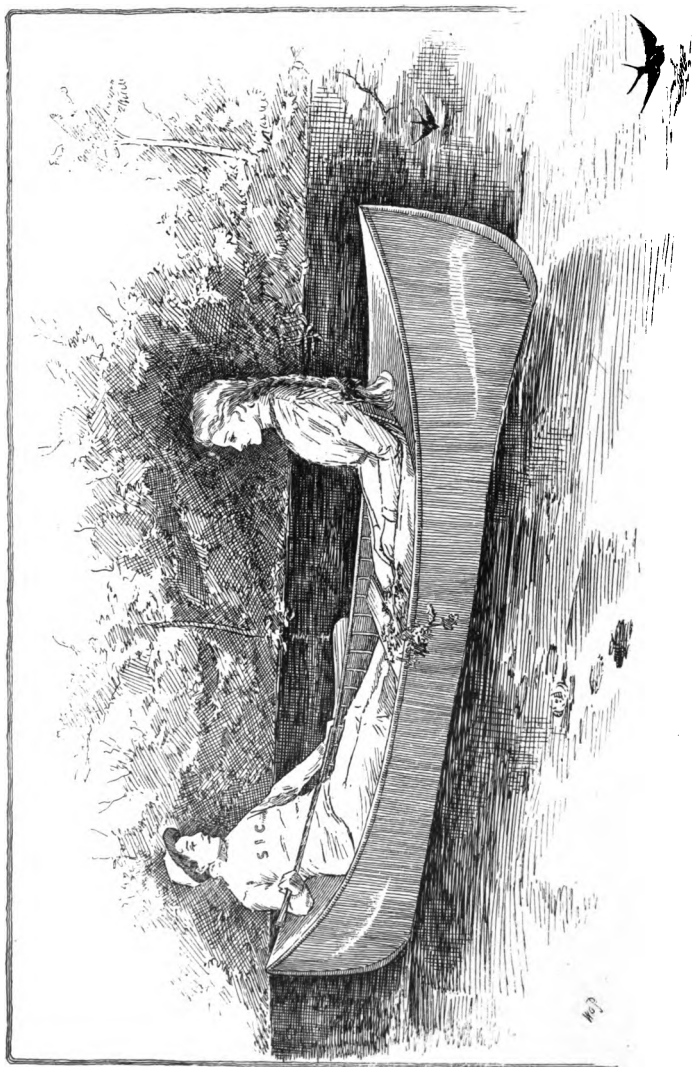
"Don't you think those things travel in the air?" she answered. "I know they do. Nobody knows just what's happened, but they all feel something has gone amiss."

"We all make mistakes — I know I do," said the boy, very gravely; "and they either help us to do better or make us worse. My mistakes have helped me more than I can say, and I think some one else has learned a good lesson, too, this summer."

"I hope so. Wasn't it a splendid race! You did row grandly."

"I don't know about that; but I astonished myself, anyway, for I didn't hope to be so near at the finish."

There was a short pause.



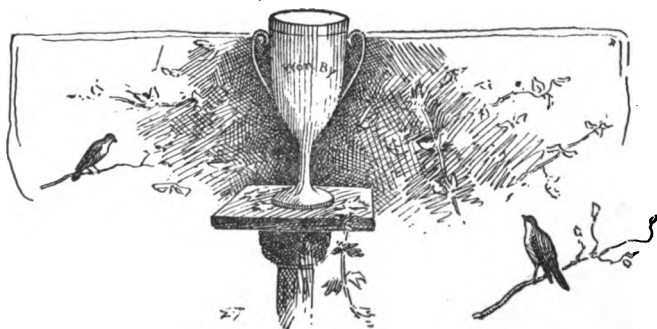
"WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT IT?" ASKED GRANT. Page 336.

"I'm sorry you didn't win, for everybody seems to have earned a medal but you."

"Oh, I don't mind that," answered Grant, cheerily. "I wasn't lucky, nor clever, I guess. But here we are at the jetty. Shall we land or take another turn? It's early yet."

"Thank you, but I must help with supper," said Virginia, stepping out and turning upon the lad with a roguish smile. "I have promised to baste that turkey you found in the cave."

"Now I wonder who's been so confidential!" soliloquized Grant, as with a light little laugh the girl tripped up the steps to camp.



CHAPTER XIX

CONCLUSION



BESSIE HILLMAN

BOTH the young sportsmen and their fourscore of guests long remembered the informal banquet, which was served in the hickory grove at eight o'clock, as one of the most enjoyable events of the day. It was essentially a game dinner, and judging from the way trout and pickerel, woodcock, grouse, wild turkey, and venison disappeared from the long table, which had been constructed somewhat after the form of a crescent, game dinners are extremely popular with all classes. Possibly the fact that young girls with rippling hair attended to the wants of the diners may have had something to do with it.

At any rate, things tasted very good. The boys had reserved chairs for the fair little waitresses, who, after having carried everything eatable from the shooting-box to the grove, finally consented to partake.

"There isn't a single thing left for to-morrow!" exclaimed Miss Bessie, as she seated herself in the chair that Perry had defended against all comers. "Mr. Lander says we could have had bacon and eggs for breakfast, but there aren't any eggs." She leaned back, fanning her pretty pink cheeks with the sombrero.

"We can have panther, then," suggested Billy. "It'll taste good, I know. Besides, we may never have another chance to get any. It'll be something to boast of some day, to say you've breakfasted on broiled panther *à la* Red Ridge."

Miss Bessie threw up her hands in alarm. "Is it popular in Crooked Trail?" she asked demurely.

"One on you, Billy," cried Harry, who was chatting with Elsie and Gertrude just opposite. "Recite your piece, old man. I hear it's great."

And so they passed the time of day, some nibbling and joking, others describing incidents of the summer's outing, or spinning yarns to their hearts' content. At nine-thirty everybody had left the board, and the work of clearing up and moving the stage and a couple of rows of chairs for the evening's fun began and was expeditiously completed, for no one

shirked his work. The chairs were strung on the inside of the table, which eventually did good service as balcony. The stage was placed about thirty feet from the chairs, in the open space just beyond the table-ends. It was simply a throne three feet high, with posts at the corners. Lamps were arranged as footlights, and a reflector of tin was nailed to the framework holding them. The Japanese lanterns, which had been hanging above the table, were then suspended from the low limbs of the near-by trees. A little tent had been erected by the stage, for a greenroom had been voted indispensable.

Precisely at ten o'clock the master of ceremonies, Jimmy Lander, mounted the platform and addressed the audience.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, after bowing in acknowledgment of a generous welcome, "I wish to say, for the benefit of those who are unfamiliar with the events of the summer, that last June seven contests were arranged between the Greyhound and the Squirrel Island Clubs, and that each club has won three; the field trials, clay-pigeon match, and the killing of the panther having been awarded to Deer Lodge, as you may have seen by your afternoon programmes. Squirrel Island has been victorious in both boat-races and the angling contest. The concluding event will now be decided, after which

General Burton will publicly distribute the medals and vase and award the banner, he with Professor Terrill and Mr. Langdon, Sr., having kindly consented to decide the forthcoming event." At this point the speaker was forced to pause until the cheers had died away. Continuing, he said: "I also wish to state that the verses you are about to hear are entirely original with the speakers, and that presumably they have never before been recited in public. So you may consider yourselves the lucky—or very unlucky—listeners, as you may decide." (Laughter.) "And now," he concluded, glancing at his list, "we will have the first piece, entitled, 'The Little Gun Shop,' by Walter Hillman, of Silverdale, Kansas."

Walter stepped from the tent at once, and mounting the stage, was hailed with a perfect storm of applause, for he was a general favorite. He was dressed in his cowboy clothes, and wore high-heeled boots ornamented with great jingling spurs. Somehow he looked the part particularly well. This may have been due to his bronzed countenance or to his limbs, which had become slightly bowed from long riding. He also bowed and lifted his sombrero, at which the hand-clapping ceased. With a gesture quite unaffected he began at once, speaking the lines very naturally and in a singularly clear and attractive style.



There's a quaint little shop at the edge of the town,
With a low, sloping roof and a color quite brown ;
Not a very grand place, you would say, to be sure,
But for blues and the like, it's a crackerjack cure ;
For it's here that the cowboys all gather for fun,
To shoot holes in the ceiling, or lie in the sun ;
They're the friendliest, jolliest lot in the land,
And are right up to snuff when it comes down to sand.

On the walls there are knives, guns, and pistols galore,
While great puma- and bear-skins half cover the floor ;
Though if I had my choice of all this, I confess,
I'd undoubtedly choose a twelve-bore hammerless.
If in failing to find on the ridges a deer,
I'm sure I'd be tempted to draw on some steer ;
Just to cause some excitement, a bit of a change,
For the lads that stand guard, o' the Chain Diamond Range.

When hot winds in July quickly parch all the corn,
And the people you pass on the street seem forlorn,
I then quietly take up my place in the shade,
And watch closely to see how a rifle is made ;



TO BE ONE OF THE GUARD O' THE RANGE! Page 343.

For I've given up hopes of becoming a king,
And believe in my heart that a puncher's the thing;
It's the wish of my life—some may think it quite strange—
To be one of the guard o' the Chain Diamond Range!



At the completion of the third and last verse, Walter bowed and returned to the tent, only to be encored. He repeated his piece, and again he was cheered as before. There was something undeniably attractive in the stanzas, especially to those who were familiar with South Kansas towns; for they suggested long rows of Osage orange hedge, alive with turtle-doves, stretching away on either hand, or level fields of corn withering beneath the wind's hot breath. The younger men, however, were more imaginative. They pictured a sunburned youth, rifle in hand, astride a trusty horse, marked on his near hip with the Chain Diamond brand. The horse might have been standing above a bunch of cactus and buffalo grass, with a crumbling buffalo skull near by, while "the little gray

hawk hangs aloft in the air." Or again, at night, they pictured the silhouette of a lonely sentinel, showing dark to the moonlight.

"Bravo! the boy did well!" cried Uncle John, who perhaps appreciated his nephew's words more than anybody else. "That's Pinky Beard's shop, isn't it, Bess?"

And Bessie nodded and clapped her hands as Lander left the greenroom to announce the second piece.

"We will next have 'The Lazy Boy,' by William Sumner Clarkson, of Crooked Trail, Arizona. It is only fair to state that these verses do not necessarily indicate the speaker's inclinations, though they may strongly suggest them." (Laughter.)

This did not "rattle" Billy, who appeared directly, looking the typical swain. He wore overalls of blue jean, which were rolled up his bare legs to the knees. A large straw hat covered his head and cast a shadow upon the smile; there was a straw in his mouth, too. He advanced to the centre of the stage with uncertain steps, his hands in his pockets, and soberly began chewing the straw. After a moment he commenced to speak in a nasal drawl that fitted the words exactly. This is what he said:—



When fishin' time comes round each spring,
I hate to go to hoein';
I'd like to take the pesky thing,
And dig up all that's growin';
Then I'd be off along the brook,
Or sailin' in the cove;
You bet I'd find some quiet nook,
Close by the hick'ry grove,
Where I'd lie down and shade my eyes
(This sunshine makes me lazy),
And hear the birds or watch the skies
Till things grew kind o' hazy.

And there I'd snooze the whole day long,
While pa could do the work,
Singin' away at his fav'rite song
Of an idle, wuthless shirk.
I guess he'd find it hard to make
The garden go without me;

It's handy to have a lad to rake
And clean things in the pantry.
And then at night I'd shuffle home,
Forgettin' all my dreams,
And beg from ma a bite or bone,
While pa — he'd dust my jeans!

This was not encored. Somehow the last line made you feel too creepy, and may have reminded many of old times. But Billy's very wry face was so comical that everybody laughed good-naturedly; and when a gray-haired mountaineer, with chin whiskers like a billy-goat's, arose from a front seat, and turning upon the assemblage, exclaimed, "I've got three sech boys to home now," you respected the lad's insight into human nature, and roared with the rest.

A Deer Lodger was next called — it was Paul, who came quietly out to deliver his sonnet on "Autumn." He wore brown knickerbockers and a snuff-colored jacket, upon the lapel of which was pinned a single spray of goldenrod. If anything, he received more than his share of plaudits, which the little fellow acknowledged gallantly enough. As soon as all was quiet he began. Here are the lines:—



The maple is tinged with crimson and yellow,
 While forests are brown and orchards are mellow.
 Sere are the pastures half-girdling the woodland,
 Whose bold brow is kissed by the silver-gray strand.
 Sad grow the notes of the fieldman's last lay,
 And faint their answers that through the glen stray;
 Chill is the wind so boldly advancing,
 Breasting sharp rocks, then battling and glancing;
 The drear echoes sound on the side of the mountain,
 Then fade into naught, like the spray from a fountain.
 Woodchopper, come ! the wildwood is calling
 'Neath the lone trees whose leaves are yet falling.
 The ground squirrel hunts for the hickory no more,
 For winter, white-mantled, awaits at the door.

A perfect tumult of huzzas arose as the flushing
 little poet returned to the greenroom. Professor Terrill
 made a note in the margin of his list, whispering to
 his fellow-judges as he did so. But before they had

finished commenting, the master of ceremonies announced the fourth and last recitation, by Grant Burton, of New York. "Being," concluded Mr. Lander, "an imaginary dialogue between 'Boy Harry' and the abandoned cat-boat *Merry Nelly*." Grant then appeared, looking for all the world like any brawny young seaman, for he had donned a navy blue suit, cap and all, belonging to one of the *Grayling's* crew. When the sound of a cordial greeting had died away, he drew back a step or two and began as follows:—

Song of the Merry Nelly

The Merry Nelly

Oh! sail with me o'er the boundless sea,
Away from the breakers' roar,
Beyond the band of shimmering sand,
Where the sea-gulls glide and soar.
My sheets are true as the billows' blue,
I've weathered the storm's wild might;
I come about at the captain's shout,
And a touch of the tiller light.

Could you have seen my white hull gleam
Through the gust and the seething foam,

You'd pity me now with my broken bow,
At last, high-dry, at home.
I signal and cry to the passers-by,
But they heed me not at all ;
My captain's afloat in another boat,
Far off in the *Nancy McCall*.

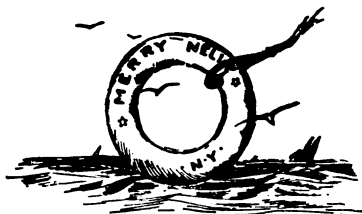
Boy Harry

Ah, *Merry Nell*, I know too well
Your skipper is off in the *Nancy* ;
She can't be beat, for she's trim and neat,
And strikes the captain's fancy.
Don't take it to heart, nor tremble, nor start,
Again you'll fleck the ocean,
And dip and rise in glad surprise,
To feel, once more, its motion.



"I'LL PAINT YOU GAY THIS VERY DAY."

So I'll paint you gay this very day —
I'll give you a coat of white,
And find a man to lend a hand
When the tide comes in to-night.
Then we'll cross the bar 'neath the evening star,
Away from the breakers' roar,
Beyond the band of shimmering sand,
Where the sea-gulls glide and soar!



"Bravo! encore, Burton!" shouted some of Grant's schoolmates, as he descended to the turf, where Billy and Walter sat with the younger element.

"Splendid!" cried Virginia, joining in the congratulations. "Won't you repeat it?"

But Grant protested, retreating to the cover of the greenroom. Here he remained until the august body of judges entered to read and discuss the boys' copies of their respective pieces, and decide accordingly. It was twenty or thirty minutes before they emerged from the tent, and you could have heard a

pin drop as the general stepped upon the platform, banner in hand, to announce the verdict.

"We have decided," said he, gravely, "to award the prize to Master Paul Marshall, of Montgomery, Alabama, a member of the Greyhound Club of Deer Lodge, whose sonnet entitled 'Autumn' contains much to recommend it. This gives the banner to the Greyhound Club, it having captured four of the seven events contested. Here you are, Harry," he concluded, shaking out the embroidered ensign amid a memorable uproar. It seemed a fitting ending to the outing, as Paul's piece was considered very good indeed. He was a member of the visiting club, and was, furthermore, very popular with everybody. Those who were familiar with the Glen Gorge episode were doubly pleased, for they alone knew that Paul, in his true Southern spirit, had taken his cousin's conduct sorely to heart. As he would not respond with a speech, Harry and Walter raised him upon their shoulders, parading about until the general stepped upon the platform to distribute the medals and vase. This, too, was accomplished amid much clapping and cheering, after which somebody shouted for "more speeches."

"Mr. Richard Halden might give us a hunting story," suggested Lander, motioning to the portly mountaineer.

"Go ahead, Dicky," urged the boys. "There's a good fellow, Dicky."

But Dicky was coy, and steadily declined the proposal, until Margaret, who was sitting near, turned in her chair and said, with her sweetest smile, "Won't you, Mr. Halden, just to please me?"

At that Dicky arose and strode toward the platform without another word.

"I'll tell you how I shot my first buck," he began at once, in his clear, high voice, dropping easily into a chair and crossing his legs. "We was huntin' up in the Log Pond country, and it was the first time I had my gun out, havin' just got old 'Dolly' from the gunsmith at Port. I wasn't much more'n a youngster, for it was over forty years back—yes, nearer fifty. I knowed I was carryin' as good a gun as the next man, 'cause my brother Jim had got one in the spring, and had won enough shootin' matches that summer to stock a turkey farm—only Jim was too fond of fowl for that. All the same, I was natural anxious to hear 'Dolly' speak; so one day Jim and me called in at Uncle Bradner's for old Dan Dimmick, who used to make the drives for us. We left our hound and took the shepherd dog, 'cause a hound ain't the best dog to make a short ridge drive with. Well, sir, Dan went up to the pond with old Jumbo, while me and Jim took our stands on the runways.

In about twenty minutes I heard Jumbo start. 'Hipe! hipe!' says he, and after a little I could hear the deer a-comin' a hundred yards off, jumpin' on the frozen ground. I could see he was reckonin' on crossin' the brook, so I calculated to stop him before he got to it if I could, for I knowed as soon as he struck the water that I couldn't see him for the spray—a man doesn't want to be in a flusteration when he's deer huntin'. But he kind of quartered, and first thing I seen him tearin' through the brush like Sam Hill.

"'Whoop!' says I, thinkin' he'd stop. But I guess he didn't hear, for on he went, a-clearin' the scrub oaks like they was nothin' there.

"'Well,' says I, 'old feller, I'll make you hear,' and with that I throws her up. 'Dolly Varden,' says I, 'speak to him!'

"'Keerow!' says she, just about as quick as that. Now right here let me tell you that's calculatin' on huntin' some, never to pull on a deer whilst he's in the air or leavin' the ground. Wait till he strikes; then you've got him steady for a mite, whilst he's gatherin' for a spring. I ketched this feller as he lit between two pitch-pines, and whanged away. On he went, but I couldn't see him no more. 'Well,' thinks I, 'now what'll Uncle Dan say!' for I'd made up my mind it was a clean miss.

"I climbed down from the stump I was on to, anyway, and follered the tracks. Pretty soon I seen a drop of blood, then another, and finally seen where it had come fast from both sides. A little farther on I seen the old feller—a noble buck—stretched out stiff and stark on some stones t'other side of a bunch of oak saplings. I cut his throat in a jiffy, you can bet, and hurried back to the stump. I hadn't no more'n got my pipe lighted than I heard Uncle Dan a-comin'.

"'Why didn't you stop that buck?' says he, for he couldn't stand for good shots like me and Jim ever missin' anything.

"'Well,' says I, 'Uncle Dan, it was an awful hard shot,' and stopped my tobacco to keep from lookin' his way.

"'Where'd you shoot?' says he.

"'Over there by them pines.'

"'Well, we'll take a look, anyhow,' says he, and over we went. I kept Uncle Dan in front, pertendin' I was all broke up over the miss. But we hadn't gone thirty feet when Uncle Dan seen the blood. 'There!' says he, 'we've got to go down to Bradner's for that hound. Jumbo won't run a wounded deer.' But I kept proddin' him on till we come to the saplings. Pretty soon Uncle Dan pushed through 'em and spied the buck. 'Look at that!' says he.

'See how that deer's cut his throat falling on them sharp rocks!' He went on up to the old feller and pulled his head over; then, turnin' to me and shakin' his fist in my face, 'You rascal!' says he, 'you've been here before!'"

"Hooray for Dicky Halden!" proposed Grant, and the lads responded heartily. "Now, Jerry, it's your turn. That was good, but I know you can beat it."

As the boy finished, the color began to leave the hunter's ruddy cheeks. But before he had time to escape, a part of the impatient audience had surrounded him, demanding a story. "Now I can't talk agin no such tales as them," confessed Jerry, edging off. "Dicky Halden has told that same lingo to everybody in Pike County twicet over, and it ought to sound good. He'll talk all night if you get him started once."

"But we'd like to hear from you," pleaded Mr. Lander. "Come, Jerry, take this chair and begin."

"Whatever you say, Chesterfield," agreed Jerry, stepping upon the throne and seating himself with some awkwardness. "I declare I don't know nothin' to tell you-all," he began, glancing about like a schoolboy in disgrace.

"Haven't you ever shot a grizzly bear?" inquired Cary.

"Them brutes don't run in these hills," answered the trapper, laconically. "I've ketched a right smart of black bear, but they don't fight no ways mean."

"Have you spent your whole life in the woods?" asked Mrs. Martin, as she, with others, drew nearer, for Jerry's quaint voice did not reach the outer circle of listeners.

"Yes'm. I like to have room to stretch myself into, so I don't bother the towns much."

"Such a lonely life!" continued Mrs. Burton. "Haven't you ever been frightened by strange sounds at night?"

Jerry considered a moment before replying.

"Not at night," said he, thoughtfully. "I was kind of flustered one day about two years ago, though."

"Do tell us about it," urged the first lady, as Jerry lit his pipe. "Was it near here?"

"It were over on Spoke Timber," began the mountaineer, drawing quietly at his corn-cob. "I was cuttin' hoop-poles for Tip Corsen on a ridge where white oak and hick'ry saplin's grew thick as hair on a dog's back. Along about the middle of the afternoon, on goin' down the swale a piece to water, my 'tention was drawed to a leetle slashin' jest across the run that some lumber fellers had quit the week afore. There was a thrashin' an' thrashin' around

in the dry bresh that sounded too mean, I can tell you. Everything cracked, now, and don't you doubt it. It beat my time, and I wouldn't go no nearer without my axe. So I skipped back right lively an' got it, droppin' my coat on the way."

"What was it?" asked a dozen in chorus, while an expectant silence fell upon the gathering.

"It were nothin' but an old log," replied Jerry, very seriously. "It were so crooked and bent that whenever it fell in the bresh it would overbalance itself and begin again. I suspect them lumber fellers had left it 'cause they couldn't tie it down long enough to knock it in two."

"That there *was* a mean log," commented Dicky, who didn't relish the applause that followed Jerry's dry explanation of the strange sounds. "I don't think much of such yarns myself." But he was the only one who failed to appreciate the story; and it is probable that he would have, too, could he have forgotten the mean advantage Jerry had taken earlier in the day.

Mr. Lander, Professor Terrill, and Mr. Langdon next made clever speeches, which were all well received, the evening's entertainment concluding with an address by General Burton, who, as a lad, had left the rugged slopes of the Catskills without a dollar in his pocket, and by sheer industry and integ-

rity had amassed in fifty years a comfortable fortune even for this modern age of multi-millionnaires, a good



GENERAL BURTON TALKS

part of which he annually expended in worthy charities. He was indeed a very fair type of the self-made American citizen at sixty-five years of age.

"There has been so much well said this evening that I fear my words will sound out of place," began the general, lifting his snowy head and glancing about at the diversified gathering. "But I

gladly welcome this opportunity to address you, for it seems to me that after the day's fun a little serious

thought might benefit us all. Before me sit men from many walks of life: mechanics, professional men, farmers, and railroaders, all of whom I infer are earning their daily bread. To these I wish to say that in this age of fierce competition it behooves each and every man to guard well his occupation, for there are sober hundreds lingering at the factory doors who are willing, eager, and able to take your place at the bench. Many of you are already past thirty. These should bear in mind that the passing of another thirty years will leave you with little strength, and should begin at once, as many doubtless have begun, to lay by for a peaceful and independent old age. It is a duty you owe yourselves and your families. No matter how small your savings are at first, remember that the power of interest is very great. Perhaps many of you find it almost impossible to meet your daily obligations; if this is so now, consider how much worse it will be when you are unable to help yourselves.

“And now let me say a few words to you, boys. The majority of you are at present in school or college, some intending to become professional men, while others no doubt are favoring a business career. I must confess my experience has shown me that college-bred men often prove disappointments in business life. But this I think is owing to the man,

and for those who can afford it a college education is undoubtedly an excellent thing. But university men who enter mercantile houses cannot expect to apply their knowledge of Greek while taking stock in a gloomy subcellar. They have still to begin with the younger clerks, and learn the business from the ground floor up. It is often hard, I admit ; but if they have worked faithfully through college, hard work and small wages will not discourage them. And let me tell you right here that life is no long play day. It is a stern battle — you will live to find it out. To succeed and be happy you must be industrious and upright in all things : stain neither your conscience nor your name — such stains are indelible. Command the respect of those about you ; be conservative ; choose your friends carefully, not for their wealth and so-called position, but for their own worth — such friends will not fail you. That is all."

The general spoke so soberly that every one was much impressed by the words. Little was said as the party broke up soon after, a large number, late as it was, returning to the river. Chapel exercises were announced for the morrow, and were held in the grove at ten o'clock. The afternoon was pleasantly spent on the lake or among the hills, and Monday morning the work of packing up and ship-

ing began. It took two of Tim's teams Tuesday and Wednesday to move the trunks, boxes, and launch to the railroad, it having been decided to beach the cat-boats and store the shells in the shore camp for the winter.

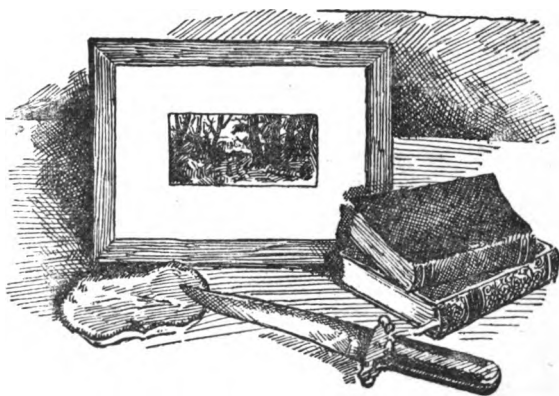
Through the early part of the week Jerry and Lander, accompanied on two occasions by Harry and Walter, searched the neighboring mountains for the wily McCaffrey, who, it was afterward ascertained, was then on his way across the state; for word came from Erie the last of the month that he had been arrested in connection with a robbery in the freight yards, and had been tried and sentenced to three years' imprisonment at Philadelphia. Matt Flint continued to work for Tim Anderson, and though always ready to relate his experiences in the Wildcat Hole to his fellow-workmen, who chaff him considerably, up to the present writing seems to have lived an upright and uneventful life. Captain Val Creedon, discharged from the hospital in August, returned at once to the wharves and the *Summer Sea*, which can be seen almost any day standing up the river with a gay party aboard. He now firmly believes that "honesty is the best policy," and living as he does in fear of the police, makes a model citizen.

Though Eugene tried his best to join in the fun

of the last days at the lake, he found it impossible to do so, for he was wretchedly unhappy. The boy did little to assist in getting off, spending most of the time in the woods by himself. The more he thought of it, the more contemptible his part in the summer's events seemed. While it might have been a pleasant memory, it was likely to remain a dreadful reproach for years to come. He longed for a change of scene that he might begin again and do better, and was, perhaps, the only one of the party that gathered at Mill Eddy Thursday afternoon to welcome the departure from the Blue Ridge. Grant was to remain behind, he and his old friends having planned a hunt for the morrow. There were some business matters to be attended to, also.

A little incident occurred just here that is well worth noting. Eugene beckoned to Grant while they were awaiting the train, and together the boys walked down the track a way. It was a warm, mellow afternoon, with a faint breeze stirring. Directly across the river a field of grain shimmered to the wind's caress, while high overhead a few cottony clouds were gliding by. Those on the platform could see that the lads were talking earnestly, and what was better still, they saw them shake hands; but just what was said they never knew. That Eugene felt much relieved they could see by

his face, though his eyes were pretty misty when he returned to board the train, which finally drew out with the boys cheering briskly in the last car. And Grant, Lander, and Jerry, standing together in the roadbed, waved them farewell.



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